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TENNYSON

AS A

RELIGIOUS TEACHER

Harley Frederick Kennedy

BY

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AUTHOR OF
"THE CONDITION OF ENGLAND," ETC.

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TO

MY OLD HEADMASTER

THE REVEREND JOHN MILLER

WITH UNCHANGING

RESPECT AND AFFECTION

31550

BURNEY PRIZE ESSAY 1899

PREFACE

A copious literature has already gathered round the work of the most widely influential English poet of the nineteenth century; and a few words need to be said as to the points in which I venture to hope that this present essay may differ from some that have preceded it.

I have patiently investigated the contents of innumerable volumes on the poetry of Tennyson; I have found the sentiments invariably amiable, and the opinions occasionally interesting. But, from the point of view of this work, I have been able to derive but little enlightenment. Many authors enlarge upon the beauty of one passage, the profundity of another, the artistic excellence of a third; the teaching of Tennyson as a whole, more especially in relation to the thought of his age, despite its immense influence upon the opinions of his contemporaries, appears rarely treated in an adequate manner. On the other hand, vague and contradictory statements are continually to be seen in popular periodicals and heard in common conversation, concerning the philosophical positions or religious beliefs advocated by Tennyson; and the wildest arguments based on isolated passages are employed to testify to his adherence to diverse and grotesque creeds. I therefore venture to entertain the hope that an attempt, for which I claim honesty, although no other excellence, to establish Tennyson's main positions from a critical examination of his work as a whole, may find acceptance with some, at least, of that class who really desire to study the relation of Tennyson's position to the thought

of his age, and have no particular views to read into his poetry.

A word of explanation is, perhaps, not unnecessary as to the method pursued in the following pages. Many of these may appear only remotely to deal with Tennyson's position, and mainly to be occupied with the comments and suggestions of the author. The chapters on Vastness, Evolution, Immortality, and others, may seem but inadequate attempts to discuss contemporary problems, with only scattered allusions to the work of Tennyson.

But the mere extraction from the work of any great author of certain categorical propositions is a dismal though easy task. To place these propositions in their correct relation to the changing thought of any given time requires a clear explanation of the exact meaning of the theories and the terms so glibly utilised, and so readily misunderstood. Such a task is as much harder as it is better worth the doing.

From one point of view my treatment of these problems will seem too full; from another, it will appear altogether inadequate. A book, instead of a chapter, on each of these questions would but give a bare discussion of outlines. Yet, perhaps, even this slight sketch may contribute towards a better understanding of the problems which confronted Tennyson and his contemporaries — problems of an age "which already in its methods of thought, its difficulties, and its ideals, is rapidly passing away."

Amid much that appears unsatisfactory in the literature that has accumulated around Tennyson's poetry, I may mention certain writings that, judged by however high a standard, must command respect and admiration. Professor Dowden's "Tennyson and Browning," in his "Essays and Studies"; Mr W. H. Mallock's Essay on Tennyson, in 'Atheism, and the Value of Life"; the last chapter in the

brilliant little study of "Tennyson," by Professor W. M. Dixon; and "Tennyson as Prophet," in "Science and a Future Life," by Mr F. W. H. Myers: these appear to me to be the best things that have been said upon Tennyson's position as a philosophical or religious teacher; to these I gladly acknowledge my obligation. In the pleasant task of personal acknowledgment, I would express my thanks to my brother, Rev. H. B. Masterman, for many suggestions, and to my friend, Rev. J. N. Figgis, for reading through the proofs, and for many helpful criticisms. For the kind advice and encouragement I have received from Mr Frederick W. H. Myers and from Canon J. Armitage Robinson I cannot adequately express my gratitude.

17 Dean's Yard, Westminster,
September 1809.

Note.—I am indebted to the courtesy of Messrs Macmillan for their kind permission to illustrate this work with full quotation.

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TENNYSON AS A RELIGIOUS TEACHER

I. INTRODUCTION

ALL great writers are, in a very real sense, the products of the age of which they are the children; their work is modified and their range is limited by the sentiments and opinions prevalent in their time. This is shown not only by the fact that the fashions and feelings peculiar to the period in which they live are depicted in their writings, but also in their whole outlook upon life. Their selection of subjects of criticism and their methods of treatment of the problems of their age are profoundly influenced by the atmosphere surrounding them. Not merely their picture of contemporary life, but their examination of those universal questions of human interest, which have attracted or troubled mankind from the first dawn of intelligence, testifies their dependence upon current opinion and the conditions of life around them. No poet can altogether transcend the limitations of the mental development of the period in which he lives. Perfection of style, depth and sincerity of thought, may ensure that the influence of his work shall endure into a remote future: but the thought will be coloured by the setting of his surroundings; the style will be influenced by the peculiar conditions of his environment; and, however far-reaching his generalisations, or however subtle and illuminating his teaching, his work must needs be the utterance of one who speaks from the

period which has produced him to present or to succeeding generations.

More fully to emphasise this fact we may consider the examples of two English poets, often compared together, and in a unique sense representative of their surroundings—Pope and Tennyson. Tennyson has been termed, not unjustly, the Pope of his own time. Pope was emphatically the child of his age; in his smooth, graceful, facile verse we can see a perfect reflection of the gay, happy, superficial life of the early years of the eighteenth century. Moral apophthegms delivered with an air of profound wisdom; the wit and satire of the coffee-houses; ballads of ladies' fans or lovers' bows; love not exhibited as a great passion but as a courtly manner of life: these are the characteristics alike of his time and of his poetry. Above all, sanity, common-sense, a cheerful optimism, a hatred of sentiment and emotion, a deliberate refusal to penetrate below the surface of things, were the elements which made up the popular philosophy of English society in the time of Queen Anne and her immediate successors. In Pope, it may be said, this age has become articulate; here, if nowhere else, its outlook upon the world, its aspirations, its depth or shallowness of thought, are stereotyped for ever. It would seem possible, from a critical examination of his poetry, to construct an adequate picture of the sentiments and ideals prevalent in the time in which he lived.

And what Pope accomplished for the eighteenth century Tennyson effected for the middle period of the nineteenth. Marvellously sensitive as he was to the changing currents of thought surrounding him, in his poetry can be discovered most of its cherished ideals. But the connection of any writer with his age is not to be sought only in the nature of the doctrines he maintains, and the first principles he accepts. The whole

choice of material for the subject of his art, and the manner in which this material is utilised, reveal his dependence upon his environment. The period in which Tennyson lived exhibits, amongst many diverse features, two that are especially prominent. It was a period of immense material progress; it was a period of feverish speculation. Life had grown infinitely more complex: with greater conscious strength, with greater unconscious weakness; the broad river of thought had split up into numberless currents, and eddies, and branch streams, falling over waterfalls, or sluggishly flowing into marshy shallows. The mind of man, confronted with huge masses of imperfectly apprehended facts, was passing through one of its great periods of change. Nothing was established as indubitably certain, everything stable and firm seemed crumbling away, the ultimate result of this corroding process no man could foretell. Thought therefore presented a bewildering complexity: uncertainty and conviction, optimism and pessimism, progress and reaction, the new claims of empirical knowledge, the protests of the older religion, inextricably mingled in a universal seething and turmoil of speculation in which the wisest might find himself astonished and the simplest dismayed.

And of all this Tennyson's poetry is the perfect reflection. No other writer has exhibited in his work so many conflicting principles of thought. The claims advanced for him as a teacher of religion may prove to be unfounded; but one thing at least is incontestable: that religious problems, and the questions arising out of religious problems, occupy a larger place in his writings than in those of almost any other English poet. Whenever from the troubled speculation of the nineteenth century some distinct truth emerges, and a temporary resting-place is attained in religious and philosophical controversy, men

will turn to the writings of Tennyson, to find delineated in perfect language the many contradictory ideals of his active and disordered time.

It is, then, as the representative of a period of religious speculation that Tennyson as a poet is a religious teacher; as a child of his age he was compelled to apply his marvellous poetical faculty to the problems and the struggles which were characteristic of his spiritual environment. Had he lived in another time his work would have been profoundly modified. He can never escape from the influence of his surroundings. Much of his work he devotes to the re-statement of the stories of Greek mythology and the great romances of the Middle Age. But to write of a dead past is not to be filled with the spirit of a time that cannot live again. Tithonus and Ulysses and Tiresias, no less than Arthur and the spiritual chivalry of Camelot, are discussing the problems, and troubled with the difficulties, and striving to attain the ideals of the men of the nineteenth century.

In this sense, then, Tennyson was representative of his period:—that he inherited the tone of deep seriousness, of interest in ultimate problems, of determined search for explanation so manifest in the surrounding atmosphere. But a further limitation has been demanded for him. He has been acclaimed as being in a narrower sense essentially the prophet of his time, the preacher of the popular movement, the representative in whom the Zeitgeist became manifestly articulate. And a superficial inspection appears to justify this statement. At one time Tennyson seemed to yield complete adherence to the new ideal; and the result was a popularity unique indeed for a writer who was also so perfect an artist. Faith in progress, material advance, scientific development, undogmatic religion, ordered freedom, in all the panaceæ

so strenuously proclaimed by the loudest-voiced party about the middle of the nineteenth century, is to be found conspicuously manifested in the early poetry of Tennyson. Did this represent the whole of the teaching left by him for future generations, it is probable that he would be finally estimated as the representative prophet of that phase of thought which succeeded the Revolutionary period and exercised the minds of men until almost the close of the century.

But such an estimation of Tennyson's position as a religious teacher would be one-sided and untrue. Even while enunciating these ideals, Tennyson had gone behind them, and developed from his personal needs principles which ultimately drove him into opposition to the party of progress and left him protesting against its later developments. During the greater part of his poetical career, Tennyson was waging open warfare with the tendencies of thought and the popular philosophies most characteristic of his age; assailed by their leaders, and, in his turn, attacking their most cherished ideals.

This divergence from the positions accepted by many of the most influential thinkers amongst his contemporaries was manifested in his advocacy of the very principles which made his greatness as a religious teacher. It was due to the fact that Tennyson maintained a certain theory of the universe, which, although modified in its manner of statement by the facts of his age, was ultimately independent of them. This religion he would have maintained in whatever age he had written; for he upheld it not only as being necessary for mankind in a certain stage of progress, but as being essential for the continual existence of the human race.

It was his strenuous advocacy of this theory which gave him his influence as a religious teacher; and the disentang-

ling of its essential principles, and the expression of their relation to the ebb and flow of contemporary thought around him, is the object of the following pages. This is the part of Tennyson's work that must live, if his influence as a teacher is to increase in the future. The greater part of his poetic achievement will survive only for the researches of the commentators on outworn philosophies or for the lovers of the artistically beautiful; each of these classes comprising a small and apparently a decreasing number of adherents.

In considering the work of any great writer it is sometimes expedient to examine his writings in chronological order, to trace the gradual progress of his mind as it develops through successive stages of thought. And in writing the history of the progress of any individual mind this method of working is essential.

But we are not here concerned with the historical development of Tennyson's mind; we are rather attempting to outline his philosophy, as a coherent whole, both in itself as a system and in its relation to philosophies surrounding him. And for such an outline it is essential to consider his work as a unity.

But the task of summarising the religious teaching of a poet is a task of peculiar difficulty. For a poet is not necessarily a philosopher or a theologian: he is primarily an artist. A writer may indeed outline philosophy in verse—as, for example, Robert Browning—or teach theology in poetry, as Dante and, in a sense, Milton. Tennyson made no pretence of essaying so arduous a task: he was an artist in words, of extraordinary power, compelled to gaze at the facts of life through the troubled atmosphere of the thought of his time. He possessed in no slight degree the peculiar artistic temperament, a marvellous sensitiveness to the thought of those amongst whom he lived. He has depicted it all, in its many shades, in a

way no other writer of the century has attempted. It is therefore sometimes difficult to disentangle his own personal opinions from the opinion of others whom he has represented. And only by comparison of widely different poems, and a careful examination of his work as a whole, shall we be able adequately to summarise the teaching that he has left as permanent evidence of his own philosophy of life.

Such a method is attempted in the following pages. We shall begin with an endeavour to exhibit Tennyson's method of approaching the one problem of the age which advancing knowledge had made strenuously insistent, the result of far-reaching generalisations and of the use for three centuries of the inductive method in the consideration of the external world; the problem of the apparent vastness of space and the apparent littleness of Man. Not until this problem has been fairly faced can any religious teacher pass to the consideration of the more definite questions of philosophy and religion.

We shall then consider how Tennyson dealt with the apprehension of God, the existence of Self, the hope of Immortality — the three great questions to which all other speculative inquiries are subsidiary. Consideration of the last of these will lead on to the method of Tennyson's recognition of the principle of Evolution, which marks his more distinctively original teaching. After this will follow an examination of those elements of Tennyson's teaching in which he has most clearly dealt with the thought of his age; his thoughts concerning Natural Theology, Spiritual and Social Religion, Practical Ethics, and the Christian Theology. Lastly, it will be necessary to attempt a brief estimate of his relation to the general spirit of his age,—how far he found himself in agreement

with his contemporaries, how far time has justified his contentions or falsified his prophecy. Such an examination should be able to yield a clear outline of the teaching of perhaps the most widely influential thinker among all the poets of the century which is now at its close.

II. VASTNESS

THE discovery of the vastness of material things is a discovery which has been producing a vague disquietude in the minds of men for the past three centuries; but a discovery, the far-reaching consequences of which most thinkers during this period have refused to accept and to consider in all its logical results. What are we justified in assuming, at the present day, concerning the position of man in the universe? How far can he still maintain ideals of life formulated under different conditions, when he was able to regard himself as the centre and unchallenged lord of creation? What is the worth of his speculation or his effort in the light of the revelation of the immensities of space and time? These are questions which, too long neglected, have at length forced themselves to the forefront of speculation — questions which must in some manner be answered before a system of religion or philosophy can be established in any way adequate to the demands of the human intelligence.

In the philosophy of the mediæval age, before the discoveries of the Copernican astronomy, the difficulties connected with this problem had not arisen. However perplexing life might appear to the individual, however impossible he might find the maintenance of the moral standard put before him, his duties, his present importance, his future greatness, were indisputably certain. To the mass of the people of this time, and even to most of its deepest thinkers, the ultimate realities of the universe presented themselves as material, solid entities. This earth, stretched out between the dwelling-place of God above and the abode of evil spirits

beneath, had been fitted and prepared by Omnipotent Wisdom as the place of man's trial and probation. All natural things, the wonders and beauties and marvellous mechanisms of the natural world, were designed and constructed in conformity with this end. The whole material system exhibited a scene of conflict between the powers of good above and the powers of wickedness beneath. The first parents of mankind had been placed by God in a realm constructed for His pleasure, which He had seen to be very good. The powers of evil, desirous of thwarting the schemes of the Almighty, had tempted them and caused them to fall. Sin had entered into the world, and with sin had entered suffering and death. Now before the assembled hosts, amidst the breathless interest of the great powers behind the visible universe, man's salvation was being attained in perpetual conflict with evil. The earth is the stage on which the great drama is being played; a stage in which the scenery changes with the varying action of the performers. Goodness produces fruitful seasons and boundless blessing; wickedness is punished by storm and blasting and ruin. This world-stage is a scene of music and colour, of wonder and mystery. Common things are endowed with strange spiritual significance, passionate loves or hates reveal or embody invisible forces; all natural objects form but a thin veil over the supernatural, for ever almost bursting through. Men and women possess unknown powers over the fates and the fortunes of others; irrevocable decisions are being recorded every moment, angels and demons visibly contend for mastery over the human soul; encompassed by this unseen, mysterious, spiritual realm, the victim and the master of so great forces, the individual journeys forward on the way to his future destiny. Below, so near, perhaps, that the cries of the lost can almost be heard, in

the moaning of the storm-wind, when all is hushed at midnight, hell flares, red with flame, material, burning fire. And overhead, just above the blue curtain of the sky, visible in some faint reflection in the brightness of sunrise, in the glories of sunset, rises with tower beyond tower, the home and dwelling-place of the Blessed, 'the spiritual city and all her spires and gateways in a glory like one pearl': material, tangible, with gates flashing with jewels, and streets of gold, with the shrine of prayer and the tree of life, aureoled saints, and maidens in white, and over all the Mother of God reigning as Queen of Heaven; all the reveries of monachism and the dreams of chivalry combining to illuminate the vision seen by the Apostle of old, when the heavens broke up for a moment disclosing the glory behind them, 'that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.'

It is easy to understand how such a view of the position of men in the universe emphasised the dignity and importance of human life. The earth was the battlefield of the eternal warfare; every man's choice was watched with intense anxiety from above and below; powers of good and evil, mysterious visitants from other worlds, bearing succour or suggesting sin, visibly walked to and fro upon the earth. Once, at least, the solid ground had opened: hell had enlarged herself, and swallowed up her victims, who went down alive into the pit. From dark forests and marshy places, from the burning mountains the visible outlets of the forces of the underworld, swarmed up demons to tempt the souls of men. They seized their victims, and bore their bodies away to the place of endless torment. They were encountered by the Saints of God, smitten and discomfited by the power of the Cross. Heaven was above; thither turned the eyes of the soldier seeking help, and the saint desiring rest. In the daytime the firmament hid its glory; the

night disclosed the floor of Paradise studded with its thousands of stars.

> There's heaven above; and night by night
> I look right through its glorious roof.
> . . . . . .
> For I intend to get to God.[1]
> . . . . . .

So to the eye of faith the two invisible worlds were ever displayed, the realities which one day would be manifestly revealed to all.

> For as I lie smiled on, full fed
> By unexhausted power to bless,
> I gaze below on hell's fierce bed,
> And those its waves of flame oppress,
> Swarming in ghastly wretchedness.
> Whose life on earth appeared to be
> One altar smoke so pure—to win,
> If not love like God's love for me,
> At least to keep his anger in,
> And all their striving turned to sin.[2]

With these two tremendous visions ever before them, as real as their daily existence; with the knowledge of the infinite importance of this world as the scene of struggle between God and His rebellious creatures; with the firm conviction that the whole scheme of nature, and all material things were directed towards, and influenced by, the presence and the probation of man; the great thinkers of the Middle Age were enabled to frame a philosophy of life which in its broad principles was comprehensible to the simplest, and in its overwhelming importance claimed universal authority over the hearts and the lives of men.

Upon this system there suddenly fell with crushing force the discoveries of the Copernican Astronomy. The strenuous resistance of the leaders of the Church to

[1] Browning: "Johannes Agricola in Meditation."
[2] *Ibid.*

the theories of Galileo was a resistance that could have been easily foreseen; for their philosopical conceptions of the universe were totally incompatible with his conclusions. Founded as their theory was on a view of reality as in its essential nature material, the discovery of the immensity of material things shattered it to fragments. The infinity of space suddenly opened in yawning blackness. 'The blue curtain of the sky no longer veiled the floor of heaven inlaid with stars'; it became a mere covering to the immense void of unfathomable greatness, strewn with planets and suns and galaxies of solar systems, and growing and dying worlds. The choice, the progress, the whole intellectual and moral life of the human race shrivelled into infinitesimal proportions. Man found himself violently dethroned from his position at the centre of the universe, and relegated to an obscure position in one of its least important elements. The conclusions drawn from these discoveries were no less disturbing. If a Deity did indeed exist, he was far removed 'somewhere beyond the fixed stars'; how different from that God previously apprehended as delighting in His servants, and bending down from Heaven to succour the creatures of His making. The words of the Psalmist took upon themselves a new and sinister meaning. "When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained, what is man, that Thou art mindful of him; and the son of man that Thou visitest him?"[1] What indeed in the light of this new knowledge was the whole life of humanity but a speck of animated dust, the transitory existence of 'a parasite of one of the meanest of the planets'?

This vast revolution in the estimate of the position of man in the universe has not even yet been clearly apprehended by the mass of mankind; but the history of the

[1] Psalm viii

past three centuries is the history of the attempts of the greatest human minds to grapple with the problem thus disclosed. In popular imagination, even until the middle of the nineteenth century, man is the centre of the material universe, and Nature is still adapted to his ends. Milton, setting out to 'justify the ways of God to man,' could in his day accept this view, showing the heavens revolving round the earth, and God and His angels visibly interfering in human affairs. But ever since its original discovery the greatest minds of the age have thrown themselves against the fact of physical vastness and shrunk back appalled. '*Combien de royaumes nous ignorent!*' says Pascal, troubled in spirit; '*Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie.*' And the effect is to make him feel '*comme un homme qu'on aurait porté endormi dans une île deserte et effroyable, et qui s'éveillerait sans connaître où il est, et sans moyen d'en sortir.*' 'The heavens declare no glory but that of Newton and Kepler' is the conclusion of modern science. "I have swept the heavens with my telescope," said Lelande, "and have not found a God." And the sentiment is re-echoed by many modern thinkers:—'We have learnt to look upon the sun shining out of a godless heaven upon a soulless earth,' is the boast of a great scientist.

> The stars that watch blind earth in the deep night swim
> Laugh, saying, what God is your God that ye call on Him?
> What is man that the God Who is guide of our way should care
> If a day for a man be golden, his night be grim?[1]

A new sentiment has arisen demanding a sense of the proportion of things in the theories and the systems of men. The spectacle, it is said, of such unimportant factors in the real universe as the successive generations of mankind, striving painfully after righteousness and calling upon the God who ruleth the courses of the stars to

[1] Swinburne: "Astrophel," etc.

interest Himself in their infinitely petty affairs, appears but calculated to provide any disinterested spectator with food for 'inextinguishable laughter.' To 'trouble deaf heaven with our bootless cries' is to expend effort in vain. If all the human race should perish, if the earth itself were blotted out from the solar system, it would make no effectual difference to the great onward sweep of material systems through an empty and illimitable sky.

"The more our thoughts widen and deepen," says a great writer, "as the universe grows upon us and we become accustomed to boundless space and time, the more petrifying is the contrast of our own insignificance, the more contemptible becomes the pettiness, shortness, fragility of the individual life. A moral paralysis creeps over us. For a while we comfort ourselves with the notion of self-sacrifice; we say, what matter if I pass, let me think of others. But the *other* has become contemptible no less than the self; all human griefs alike seem little worth assuaging, human happiness too paltry at the best to be worth increasing. The whole moral world is reduced to a point; the spiritual city, 'the goal of all the saints,' dwindles to the least of little stars; good and evil, right and wrong, become infinitesimal ephemeral matters; while eternity and infinity remain attributes of that only which is outside the realm of morality. Life becomes more intolerable the more we know and discover, so long as everything widens and deepens except our own duration, and that remains as pitiful as ever. The affections die away in a world where everything great and enduring is *cold*; they die of their own conscious feebleness and bootlessness." [1]

And early in the nineteenth century the paralysing effect produced on human effort by the revelation of the

[1] "Natural Religion," p. 251

vastness of the material universe was intensified by the further discoveries of modern science. For these have done for time what astronomy had accomplished for space. Time until then had appeared a possible refuge for the imagination crushed by the immensity of material things. "They shall perish," could still be asserted, "but Thou shalt endure; and they all shall wax old, as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed; but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail." Man might be infinitely little in space, compared to the vastness of sun and star; but in time he might survive them all.

> The stars shall fade away, the sun himself
> Grow dim with age, and nature sink in years,
> But thou shalt flourish in immortal youth
> Unhurt amid the war of elements,
> The wrecks of matter, and the crush of worlds.[1]

But this despairing retreat was destroyed by the evolutionary theories of Natural Science, which swept down upon the astonished mind of man, and left him bewildered and dismayed. For these disclosed to him a world stretching backward through immense periods of time before the first appearance of men, peopled by a thousand types that had for ever passed away. They described an evolution towards more complex life; but an evolution which appears indifferent to man's ideals of goodness and beauty; and an evolution which 'in the precession of the Great Year' must presently attain its zenith and commence its downward course towards ultimate dissolution. They disclosed a moral law, not, as Kant held, of a sublimity competent to counterbalance the burden of the immensity of the starry heavens above; but as a series of rules and ingenious devices for the preservation of the species, the inherited instincts of

[1] Addison: "Cato."

that race which had survived in the long and arduous struggle for existence. And they anticipated a future when the upward progress would cease, when life would vanish from this planet, and the whole solar system sink into a state of stagnation, a universe of motion without energy, 'worn with the dust of its own grinding.' Humanity has warred ceaselessly with the Time-Spirit; and although in the life of each unit Time has proved victorious and the individual has been compelled to acknowledge defeat; yet by perpetual renewal in the race, and the transmission to succeeding generations of the stored-up results of past effort, it seemed possible that although men might perish man might ultimately triumph. But the empirical theories of Natural Science have destroyed this last desperate hope. They have demonstrated that, "by the working of the same immutable laws that are at present operating, after a period long compared with the individual life, but short indeed compared with the divisions of time open to our investigations, the energies of our system will decay, the glory of the sun will be dimmed, and the earth, tideless and inert, will no longer tolerate the race which has for a moment disturbed its solitude. Man will go down into the pit and all his thoughts will perish. . . . Nor will anything that *is* be better or be worse for all that the labour, genius, devotion, and suffering of men have striven through countless generations to effect."[1]

It is very evident that this disquieting apprehension of the littleness of man and the greatness of the Universe, with all its inevitable consequences, must be fairly considered by any writer who would claim the function of a religious teacher during this present age; and either accepted as necessary and permanent, or explained as illusory. Unless definitely encountered it remains as

[1] Balfour: "Foundations of Belief," p. 31.

a disturbing phantom behind any philosophic or religious system, urging continually the futility of moral effort and the absurdity of mental speculation, and

> the exceeding weight
> Of God's intolerable scorn
> Not to be borne.[1]

The inherited and organised faiths of mankind were largely based on principles formulated during the survival of the older system, when man could regard himself as the centre of all things; if retained at all they must be profoundly modified by the newer conceptions of the Universe. However much relief may be given by some temporary and wilful blindness, no constructive system which refuses to face this problem boldly can ever provide sufficient sanction for the acceptance of the moral law, or stifle a feeling of contempt for a creature in imagination so great, in actual importance so little. The question stands in front of any attempted speculation: before dealing with the problems of life as they appear to each one of us in his limited sphere of action, it is essential first to establish some kind of relation between this limited sphere of action and the real world beyond.

Tennyson, more perhaps than any other great writer of the century, felt the full force of the revolution in thought produced by the knowledge of the physical immensity of the Universe. In his early poems he had described the vision of the soul contemplating

> Regions of lucid matter taking forms,
> Brushes of fire, hazy gleams,
> Clusters and beds of worlds and bee-like swarms
> Of suns and starry streams.[2]

[1] Swinburne: "Félise."

[2] "Palace of Art" (unpublished stanzas): "Life," vol. i. p. 120.

And the poet utters his own sentiment through the mouth of his hero when he makes him lament his knowledge of

> A sad astrology,—the boundless plan
> That made you tyrants in your iron skies,
> Innumerable, pitiless, passionless eyes,
> Cold fires, yet with power to burn and brand
> His nothingness into man.[1]

Again and again the thought troubles him, recurring at intervals all through his writings. Twenty years later, speaking in his own person, he can reject the phrase applied to him, 'A star among the stars,' acknowledging half-playfully yet half-mournfully that the sphere is too serious to dally with, as old Horace did, half in jest; who

> Scarce could see, as now we see,
> The man in Space and Time,
> So drew perchance a happier lot
> Than ours, who rhyme to-day.
> The fires that arch this dusky dot—
> Yon myriad-worlded way—
> The vast sun clusters' gathered blaze,
> World-isles in lonely skies,
> Whole heavens within themselves, amaze
> Our brief humanities.[2]

The realisation of this knowledge is never far from him, and always bringing the same thought, the 'cold fires,' with their 'power to burn and brand his nothingness into man.'

> What are men that He should heed us? cried the King of sacred song;
> Insects of an hour, that hourly work their brother insect wrong,
>
> While the silent Heavens roll, and Suns along their fiery way,
> All their planets whirling round them, flash a million miles a day.[3]

[1] "Maud." [2] Epilogue. "Charge of the Heavy Brigade."
[3] "Locksley Hall, Sixty Years After."

Or in that awful vision of 'Despair' introduced by the bald explanation, "A man and his wife having lost faith in a God and hope of a life to come, and being utterly miserable in this, resolve to end themselves by drowning," he can show how much this despair is fostered by the contemplation of the immensities of space:—

> And the suns of the limitless Universe sparkled and shone in the sky,
> Flashing with fires as of God, but we knew that their light was a lie—
> Bright as with deathless hope—but, however they sparkled and shone,
> The dark little worlds running round them were worlds of woe like our own—
> No soul in the heaven above, no soul on the earth below,
> A fiery scroll written over with lamentation and woe.[1]

Even when he had provided a solution satisfactory to the human reason, at any time when 'faith had fallen asleep' the horror of vastness returned to disturb his rest. Man seemed to be but the one little spot illuminated, with all around the dark unfathomable abysses of Time and Space. He accepted completely the conclusions of modern science as to the development and probable fate of life on this world:—

> Many an Æon moulded earth before her highest, Man, was born,
> Many an Æon too may pass when earth is manless and forlorn.[2]

How many changes in these eternities had already passed! 'There rolls the deep where grew the tree,' he exclaims, 'O earth what changes hast thou seen!'[3] How many forms of life had vanished! Man inquiring

[1] "Despair." [2] "Sixty Years After." [3] "In Memoriam," cxxiii.

of Nature, could bring back 'from scarped cliff and quarried stone' but the same terrible message :—

> She cries, A thousand types are gone :
> I care for nothing, all shall go.[1]

One shifting of the scene, and humanity with all its hopes and fears will have disappeared for ever. At the gates of the grave he is troubled with the same haunting fear of the 'silent and gigantic stars.' 'Will my tiny spark of being wholly vanish in your deeps and heights?' he asks in one of his last poems of the 'rush of Suns, and roll of systems, and your fiery clash of meteorites.'[2] And in that tremendous vision of 'Vastness,' half in despair, half in a kind of fierce satisfaction, recognising that 'many a planet by many a sun may roll with the dust of a vanished race,' he inquires of all the heat and the hurry and the dust of man

> What is it all but the trouble of ants, in the gleam
> of a million million of suns.[3]

Tennyson's first attempts to solve this great problem consist of mere affirmation without explanation—affirmation of the reality of self through the reality of love. He deliberately turns away from the immensity of Space, and refuses any longer to comtemplate it. I am : I love : this, at least, is certain. All the rest may be illusion and a dream : whatever reality may pertain to these masses of dead matter, this is real for me, and no discovery of physical vastness can take it from me. There is that in my love which matter does not possess, something which can provide 'the countercharm of space and hollow sky,' a reality of the world not seen and eternal.

This is the reply of the hero of 'Maud' to the maddening thoughts suggested by his 'sad astrology.'

[1] "In Memoriam," lvi. [2] "God and the Universe."
[3] "Vastness."

> But now shine on, and what care I,
> Who in this stormy gulf have found a pearl
> The countercharm of space and hollow sky,
> And do accept my madness, and would die
> To save from some slight shame one simple girl.[1]

This, again, is Tennyson's final answer to the question in 'Vastness.' What is it all, he had asked of the 'raving politics never at rest' and the ceaseless turmoil of men, but 'a murmur of gnats in the gloom, or a moment's anger of bees in their hive': and his answer was that it is very much more than these, because it is the love of the human spirit, which no mass of matter can possess or destroy:—

> Peace, let it be! For I loved him, and love him for ever: the dead are not dead but alive.[2]

One who has loved, says Tennyson, need no longer be appalled at the thought of the contrast between his own littleness and the greatness of things; in loving he has shown himself greater than any material system. My existence may be a 'tiny spark of being'; but it is a real spark, not a phantom one: part of a world which no immensity of space and time can render illusory. The reality of love for the living testifies to him the reality of the living self: the survival of the affection, long after the object of it has vanished from the earth and his bodily form has crumbled into dust, yields him hope for an immortality beyond the material world. 'Love will conquer at the last.' By the strength of the love in himself for someone outside himself the individual personality, insignificant in space, a mere speck of living dust amid the stellar systems, is able to stand up and confront these with a stout heart and undismayed.

But in this first attempt to encounter the problem the human intellect cannot rest satisfied; it must go forward

[1] "Maud," xviii. [2] "Vastness."

in an effort to escape from this unsatisfactory dualism, the reality of the macrocosmos without us, the reality of the microcosmos within. The mind incessantly craves for some kind of harmony, and refuses to acquiesce in the discord between these two entities. And so Tennyson was compelled to essay an explanation. He found it in the form of idealism taught by that philosopher who had never wearied of contemplating the sublimity both of the starry heavens without and the moral law within. This was the assertion of the subjective element in space; that space is not a reality outside our own consciousness, but, at least as apprehended by us, a product of this consciousness itself.

"Space is nothing but the form of all phenomena of the external senses," says Kant; "it is the subjective condition of our sensibility, without which no external intuition is possible for us"[1]; and again, "If we drop our subject, or the subjective form of our senses, all qualities, all relations of objects in Space and Time, nay, Space and Time themselves, would vanish."[2]

The world, as we know it, the whole material universe, Tennyson maintains, is but a vision or a picture in our minds and the minds of beings possessing organisations similar to our own. Impressions have rained down upon us from something beyond ourselves; each of us has woven these impressions into a unity, which he terms the Natural World. How different this may be from the real world outside ourselves we cannot at present apprehend; but we can at least emphasise the impossibility of being content with the first naïve view of things, the impossibility of the assertion that this manifestation of consciousness, must possess a real tangible existence outside the minds which apprehend it. In this sense it is untrue to affirm that humanity could be removed from the

[1] Kant: "Critique of Pure Reason," p. 21. [2] *Ibid.* p. 34.

solar system without making any practical difference in the economy of the universe: for if all consciousness were simultaneously to cease, the whole material system would suddenly disappear; 'the great globe itself and all which it inherit' would vanish like a dream, leaving 'not a rack behind.' There must indeed be a real world outside ourselves from which originate these impressions: but the world of matter and motion, the world of the immensities of space and innumerable stars and suns is a world created by consciousness, which with the destruction of mind would also vanish quite away.

That Tennyson recognised and accepted this method of escape from the difficulties of the greatness and inexplicable contradictions of the external world is shown by the allusions scattered at intervals throughout his poetry. 'All the suns,' he considers, are but

> symbols of innumerable man,
> Man or Mind that sees a shadow of the planner or the plan.[1]

The world, he says in another poem, is a dream of the conscious spirit: 'dreams are true while they last, and do we not live in dreams?'[2] But dreams, in the end, will vanish with the spirit's awakening. Space and Time are but symbols, the garments worn by the living soul, in which it clothes itself for a season. Examination of this dream-world shows how completely incomprehensible it is, if assumed to possess a real objective existence: a world full of contradiction: a

> divisible-indivisible world
> Among the numerable-innumerable
> Sun, sun, and sun, thro' finite-infinite space
> In finite-infinite Time.[3]

Such a theory, indeed, can result in nothing but the

[1] "Sixty Years After." [2] "The Higher Pantheism."
[3] "De Profundis."

abandonment of the problem in despair, and in the recognition of things as ultimately unintelligible. But it is the living spirit that lives, the world that is phantom; and we, the poor earth's dying race, and yet no phantoms, watch from a phantom shore, and await the fading of the 'phantom walls of this illusion.'[1] 'The Sun, the Moon, the Stars,' these immensities which once affrighted us, are but the 'Vision of Him who reigns'[2]: 'shadows concealing the spiritual Being behind them,' 'making Him broken gleams, and a stifled splendour and gloom' sign and symbol of a division that will not everlastingly endure. So man, in his 'little life,' can triumph over the vastness of the sense-given world. Above the 'Giant Ages' stands the human soul, greater than them all, because the creator of them all: behind the ebb and flow is the spirit that cannot die.

> For tho' the Giant Ages heave the hill
> And break the shore, and evermore
> Make and break, and work their will:
> Tho' world on world in myriad myriads roll
> Round us, each with different powers,
> And other forms of life than ours,
> What know we greater than the soul?[3]

Material things will go when their function is fulfilled; the thought of man is higher than them all.

> Not raised for ever and ever,
> But when their cycle is o'er,
> The valley, the voice, the peak, the star
> Pass, and are found no more.
>
> The Peak is high and flush'd
> At his highest with sunrise fire;
> The Peak is high, and the stars are high,
> And the thought of a man is higher.[4]

[1] "The Ancient Sage." [2] "The Higher Pantheism."
[3] "Death of the Duke of Wellington."
[4] "The Voice and the Peak."

He that has made us with the power for such knowledge, who has 'set the sphere of all the boundless Heavens within the human eye,'[1] has also 'sent the shadow of Himself, the boundless, thro' the human soul': He has 'meant us to be mightier by and by.' We can go forward in the knowledge that 'the highest Human Nature is divine': till we 'find the deathless Angel seated in the vacant tomb'; till we apprehend that this 'myriad world'[2] is but 'the shadow of the silent opener of the gate': and that 'not one life shall be destroyed, . . . when God hath made the pile complete.'[3]

So that Tennyson is able to return to the examination of the problems of existence in the little corner in which each of us lives with the conviction that the ultimate questions connected with them may not, after all, have been so completely changed since the time of the formulation of the older ideas. Before, man was conceived as journeying forward in time between two limiting boundaries, behind which he could not penetrate; the solid earth beneath him, the curtain of the sky above his head. Between these he possessed a real knowledge of things; beyond was the Eternal world, only visible to the eye of faith. The disclosure of that which lay behind these limitations appeared to throw back the Eternal world somewhere beyond the confines of the visible Universe. But now he recognises that it only drew the limitations tighter around him; for he has discovered these limitations to be within himself; he has learnt that he possesses no knowledge even of the region between earth and sky of which he thought himself to have acquired so clear an apprehension; only just outside himself is the horizon of the unknown. He sees, as in a vision, darkly; he is shut in by the veil

[1] "Sixty Years After." [2] "God and the Universe."
[3] "In Memoriam."

of the flesh; as things appear to his senses, so only can he apprehend them. And these can give him no guarantee of the truthfulness of their representations of the region behind them. We pass forward through time, journeying to an unknown future, as if swathed in cotton-wool: of the nature of the forces which beat upon the other side of our bandages we have no means of comprehension. Or as if gazing through smoked, distorting glasses, we cannot apprehend, by the dim light that alone is able to penetrate through them, the hidden glories of the Eternal World. Those overpowering distances in Space, those unfathomable periods of Time, what are they but the constructions of our own minds, the attempts of our limited finite intelligence to measure, and estimate, and gather into unity, the infinite world beyond us; the abstraction of the shadow of reality as thrown upon our minds? These may, indeed, represent symbolically something in the real world. But they cannot be identified with this real world; they are a construction of our own imagination; a synthesis of shadows. For like prisoners in a den of dim twilight, and chained so that they cannot move, men see only their shadows, or the shadows of others, thrown by the fire on to the opposite wall of the cave: confined to this knowledge of reflections and echoes, they mistake these for real things, and from them construct the picture of a permanent Universe. But could they but once turn round and through the opening of the cave behold the sun, never again would they tremble at shadows: born blind or deaf, and suddenly healed, how they would 'glory in all the splendours and the voices of the world'[1]; filled with knowledge of this Beatific Vision, the illusion of the senses would trouble them no more.[2]

[1] "The Ancient Sage." [2] *Cf.* Plato: "Republic," Bk. vii.

This is Tennyson's answer to the problem of the intolerable greatness of Space; and by this answer he declares his conviction that the results of empirical investigation, however synthesised into broad, sweeping generalisations, can never yield us knowledge of the ultimate reality of the world. For empirical science is but the unifying of sense impressions apprehended by our minds and woven into a single picture; but of the cause of these impressions, or of the mechanism producing this design, it can yield us no knowledge.

For all we know to the contrary there may be those about us, the Powers of Good and Powers of Ill, whom we can neither see nor name;[1] our 'whole life may be soaking in a spiritual atmosphere of which we have no conception.' There is

> The Abysm of all Abysms, beneath, within
> The blue of sky and sea, the green of earth,[2]

to which human science can never penetrate. And for the apprehension of the real nature of this we shall require a method different from that by which we constructed the material world. Only, we may refuse to be oppressed by the Vastness of this Universe. It is a phantom—a phantom of our own dreams—a phantom destined to vanish away.

> And we, the poor earth's dying race, and yet
> No phantoms, watching from a phantom shore
> Await the last and largest sense to make
> The phantom world of this illusion fade,
> And show us that the world is wholly fair.[3]

Tennyson has exhibited the course of reasoning whereby physical vastness loses its terrors. He can, henceforth,

[1] "Sixty Years After." [2] "The Ancient Sage." [3] *Ibid.*

put aside the clashing of suns and stars, and consider the problems of life as they present themselves in his own consciousness. And these in themselves are sufficiently difficult of comprehension. The Universe need no longer affright us through its greatness. But what indeed is behind it? What is this reality for which the human mind must continue to search, which it has sought throughout so many generations? Is it for ever to be Unknowable to us? Is everything a phantom dream, life a 'series of phenomena cast upon a background of nothingness'? Or are we indeed justified in re-stating the older principle, postulating the visible world as the 'vision of Him who reigns,' and 'behind the veil' a God 'closer than breathing, nearer than hands or feet'? With the removal of the horror of Vastness, this becomes the fundamental problem of the speculative intellect.

III. THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

TENNYSON had escaped from the oppression of vastness by his apprehension of the symbolic nature of our sense-given knowledge. He was therefore able to exhibit the individual boldly confronting and no longer terrified by a Universe to the creation of which he has himself contributed. The knowledge of the senses, he finally concluded, yields us no direct knowledge of the reality behind phenomena. But the recognition of this fact has but little lightened the mystery of the world. The nature of the reality which these changes symbolise; the relation between this ultimate source of being and those persistent groups of sensations which we call inanimate and living things; this pain which is so real to each individual consciousness; the meaning of life to each person and the plan of the life of the whole; all the old questions connected with these inexplicable elements of existence arise again with all their constant importunity. We may have logically established that space and spatial change cannot be regarded as the final solution of the riddle of the Universe; but this is only a negative statement, and advances us but a little way towards the desired explanation. Are we driven by inexorable reasoning to the assertion of the opposite position, the re-echo of the whisper of the 'lying lip' of Sorrow?

> 'The stars,' she whispers 'blindly run';
> A web is wov'n across the sky;
> From out waste places comes a cry,
> And murmurs from the dying sun:

'And all the phantom, Nature stands—
With all the music in her tone,
A hollow echo of my own,—
A hollow form with empty hands.'[1]

And is the final word on the problem to be the re-assertion of the conclusion of the eastern philosopher that "human existence is not a dark spot in an ocean of dazzling splendour, but a will-o'-the-wisp that merely intensifies the murkiness of everlasting night?"[2] Or is the forward progress of things simply indifferent to the ends and objects of man, with behind the visible scene an unknowable world of things in themselves standing ever immutably apart from the phantom flux and flow of this world of striving and change? Or, on the other hand, may the contrary assertions be justified; of a Power behind, working through darkness, speaking indirectly to men through the realm of Nature or immediately as Spirit to Spirit, guiding, moulding man, assisting his efforts, interested in his upward progress, ensuring his final triumph over

The steps of Time—the shocks of Chance,
The blows of Death?[3]

Never perhaps have these questions seemed more importunate than during the age of unrest which occupied the middle period of the nineteenth century. It was an age of great intellectual advance; old landmarks were disappearing, old systems crumbling away. Theories that had once appeared indisputable had ceased to satisfy. Men's minds had not yet been enabled to swing round to the novel point of view: many looked out on the astounding conclusions of natural science surprised and bewildered; numbers gave up in despair any attempt at explanation and took refuge in an empty empiricism or a

[1] "In Memoriam," iii.
[2] Dillon: "Sceptics of the Old Testament," p. 33.
[3] "In Memoriam," xcv.

forced indifference. Tennyson, like others of the more earnest thinkers, refused this easy course; he pressed forward, striving to wrest the secret from the limits of knowledge; ever seeking to formulate some philosophy which might appease the craving of humanity for light; determined to omit nothing from the range of his speculation, never to shut his eyes to any facts however inexplicable, never to rest until he had apprehended some system which would satisfy the need and justify the effort of man.

The whole difficulty arose from the apparent impossibility of reconciling the present and past condition of the world with any Divine or moral government; the whole problem which all recognised, although finding many different solutions to it, was summed up by a contemporary of Tennyson in one of the greatest passages of modern literature:—

"I look out of myself into the world of men, and there I see a sight which fills me with unspeakable distress. The world seems simply to give the lie to that great truth, of which my whole being is so full; and the effect upon me is, in consequence, as a matter of necessity, as confusing as if it denied that I am in existence myself. If I looked into a mirror, and did not see my face, I should have the sort of feeling which actually comes upon me when I look into this living busy world and see no reflection of its Creator. . . . The sight of the world is nothing else than the prophets' scroll, full of lamentations, and mourning, and woe.

"To consider the world in its length and breadth, its various history, the many races of men, their starts, their fortunes, their mutual alienation, their conflicts; and then their ways, habits, governments, forms of worship; their enterprises, their aimless courses, their random achievements and acquirements, the impotent conclusion of long-

standing facts, the tokens so faint and broken of a superintending design, the blind evolution of what turn out to be great powers or truths, the progress of things, as if from unreasoning elements, not towards final causes, the greatness and littleness of man, his far-reaching aims, his short duration, the curtain hung over his futurity, the disappointments of life, the defeat of good, the success of evil, physical pain, mental anguish, the prevalence and intensity of sin, the pervading idolatries, the corruptions, the dreary hopeless irreligion, that condition of the whole race so fearfully yet exactly described in the Apostle's words 'having no hope and without God in the world'—all this is a vision to dizzy and appal, and inflicts upon the mind the sense of a profound mystery, which is absolutely beyond human solution."[1]

A 'vision to dizzy and appal' it is to all contemplating it in its entirety; 'and although few possess the courage thus to consider it as Tennyson or as Newman considered it, in its wide sweep and all-inclusive greatness, yet even the broken fragments of this vision have perplexed the minds and troubled the hearts of all too many inquirers. The question is there, staring before all, imperatively demanding an answer; the difficulties only increase with the advancement of knowledge, the necessity of insistence upon some sort of reply grows more emphatic. What solution can we obtain which will recognise the true facts and yet reconcile them, which will be capable of combining the apparent existence now of blind chance, now of definite evil, with the faith in an Omnipotent Providence who is All-Merciful and All-Wise?

With varying force but always present, the problem has pressed upon the minds of thinkers from the days of remote antiquity. And those who have attempted an answer, and not relinquished in despair the search for light,

[1] Newman, "Apologia," p. 241.

have adopted in the main one of two possible alternatives, have formulated replies which, in effect, have been repeated with but little variation until our own time. There is first the answer of Fatalism; the answer, for example, given by some pious scribe in the speech of Elihu interpolated in the Book of Job, one of the earliest attempts to consider adequately and fearlessly the problem of evil. The author of the drama cannot reconcile the spectacle of innocent suffering with belief in an All-Perfect God. Elihu's answer to his difficulty is that any such speculation is an impious questioning of the designs of a Power so infinitely transcending our finite minds that we cannot hope to comprehend His methods of working. God is all-powerful; our duty is not to trouble ourselves concerning His actions, but to take with thankfulness whatever He is pleased to send us. Our inquiries will only provoke Him to anger and sore displeasure. God is great, is the reply to all difficulty, and we are but as worms in His sight. 'I will answer thee that God is greater than man,' says Elihu, 'why dost thou strive against Him; for He giveth not account of any of His matters.'[1] 'Remember that thou magnify His work which men behold.'[2] 'Behold God is great and we know Him not; neither can the number of His years be searched out.'[3] 'Shall it be told Him that I speak? If a man speak surely he shall be swallowed up.'[4]

Elihu's answer to the difficulty which troubled the author of the Book of Job has been repeated at intervals throughout the long progress of human history. Behold God is in heaven: He hath done whatsoever pleaseth Him. Canst thou by searching find out God? His ways are wonderful, and past finding out. This solution of the problem has been adopted again and again by the orthodox adherents of dead religions, to stifle speculative

[1] Job xxxiii. 12, 13. [2] Job xxxvi. 24. [3] Job xxxvi. 26. [4] Job xxxix. 20.

inquiry amongst those who could not accept their teaching, or reconcile the divergent evidences of facts as to His Nature. 'Who art thou that judgest thy Maker? Be thankful lest some worse judgment befal thee.' And the reply has been petrified into religious systems, in which worship is offered to this unknown God, designed to appease His wrath by blind acceptance of His doings. Such, for example, was the creed of Calvinism, which acknowledged the incompatibility of its conception of the originating will with its conception of an All-Merciful Goodness, but holding that some souls were created only for dishonour and others for divine election, was forced to take refuge in the inscrutable power of God, and to praise Omnipotent Might, even where it appeared irreconcilable with ethical perfection.

> God whom I praise: how could I praise
> If such as I might understand,
> Make out, and reckon on His ways
> And bargain for His love?[1]

And the same answer appears in many modern forms of religion, from the speculative theology which would invite us to worship a Deity of Omnipotent power, although His justice is not as our justice, nor His ways as our ways, nor His mercy as the mercy of men; down to that philosophy which finds a vague emotional satisfaction in the contemplation of an Unknowable, lying behind phenomena, in its own essential nature for ever concealed from us.

But none of these systems based on the mere assertion of the Magnitude and Infinite Strength of the power forming the reality behind material things can ever permanently satisfy the aspirations of humanity and the yearning of the soul towards God. Although they may form a refuge, in times of perplexity, from the mass of

[1] Browning: "Johannes Agricola in Meditation."

facts which appear hopelessly confused and chaotic; yet they are unable to provide either justification for moral effort or the spiritual consolation which is demanded by the religious consciousness. And in consequence they all inevitably fall back into either a blind fatalism or a system of fierce defiance. The first of these, the 'Atheism of force,' the worship of mere might apart from goodness, ultimately produces a dull acquiescence in things as they are accompanied by the pious assertion that God is great. The reaction from this, on the other hand, throws men into resolute opposition to a God who appears unconformable with their highest ethical ideal. Why, it is said, should I obey Him? Why should I be crushed by His greatness? What right has mere overwhelming power to demand my allegiance or my love? Suppose, despite all, I defy Him: the worst He can do is to send me to hell, and what then? Such is the 'Everlasting No' of Carlyle. "'Behold thou art fatherless, outcast, and the universe is Mine,' to which my whole Me now made answer, 'I am not Thine but Free, and forever hate thee.'" [1]

Something more is required, then, beyond belief in the infinite greatness of God and the unsearchableness of His ways among men. And a thinker living before the writer of the Book of Job had found a different solution to a problem essentially of the same nature. The prophet Habakkuk, in the dying days of the kingdom of Judah, beholding the apparent triumph of the wicked, and oppressed with doubts as to the possibility of reconciling this fact with his faith in the goodness of God, had passionately sought for the removal of his difficulty. "Upon my watch-tower I will stand and take my post on the rampart. I will watch to see what He will say to me, and what answer I get to my plea." [2] "How long, O

[1] Carlyle: "Sartor Resartus"—"The Everlasting No."

[2] Habakkuk ii. 1.

Jehovah, have I called, and Thou hearest not? I cry to Thee violence, and thou sendest no help."[1] And down from his watch-tower the prophet had brought back his answer. "The Vision is for an appointed time: yet it hurries to the end and shall not fail. Though it tarry, wait thou for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry: . . . but the just shall live by faith."[2] The just shall live by *faith*; only by faith that His postulate is true, that God is not simply great, but 'All-loving too,' can the seeker after righteousness find adequate motive in his effort after personal and universal good. And the effort called forth by the acceptance of this faith will react on his belief itself, until gradually but continually the darkness is lightened and the burden of doubt rolls away.

This is the second answer to the perpetual inquiry. And all through the disordered transitory centuries since that first message from the watch-tower of the prophet this answer has been re-echoed by those who have been able to discern but little good in the present, or guidance for the future. It is the basing of the whole personality in all its actions upon the assumption that the aspiration and the effort of men is not being expended entirely for nought. By 'faith and faith alone' man prays to a God whom he asserts to be not only Infinite Power but also 'Immortal Love'; believing where he cannot prove, trusting that the little systems of human knowledge are but broken lights of the glory which no man can approach unto, 'he thinks he was not made to die'; and his highest life is dependent on belief in the justice of the Maker of Life and of Death.[3] Absolute proof of the existence of a Perfect God is from the nature of our present limitations impossible. But the 'one hope of our poor wayward race' rests on faith in a God 'behind the veil,' All-Powerful,

[1] Habakkuk i. 2. [2] *Ibid.* ii. 3. [3] "In Memoriam," Introduction.

yet All-Just and All-Merciful, who delighteth in goodness and hateth evil, who will ensure in some way that at present we cannot even dimly comprehend that 'good will be the final goal of ill.' By steadfast adherence to this faith, despite all facts which apparently deny it, by faithfulness in basing our whole conduct on the possibility of its truth despite absence of logical proof, apprehension of its reality will gradually come home to us, things which were dark will become clear, and justification for the effort and the toil which we have accepted will ultimately be assured.

This position of the prophet of Israel is the substantial position adopted by the poet of the nineteenth century. Knowledge of facts, making towards belief in a beneficent Providence has immensely increased since that far-distant time; but so also has the knowledge of facts appearing to run directly counter to this belief. Doubts and difficulties pressed around Tennyson with relentless force: one problem after another faced him;—premature death, blind forces working through the darkness, the doubtful proofs of a life hereafter, the carelessness, the indifference, the apparent waste of love and effort and life in the world of Nature and of Man. What did it all mean? To what end was all this tumultuous strife directed? Is it directed by an indifferent God, or a powerless God, or no God at all but the blind drift of things through an empty sky? Tennyson replies, We have no means of certainly judging. Take the whole problem, the Universe as we know it in all its contradictory elements, and by pure logical argument we can arrive at no indubitable conclusion as to its ultimate nature. Somewhere we must make the leap in the dark; somewhere we must start forward on the venture of faith. And by this faith we shall be justified. The truth will come home to us if we stake our whole personality on its reality; if we act as if human

effort did count for something, and the struggle after goodness was not only a grotesque and transient dream.

> This man throws himself on God, and unperplexed,
> Seeking, shall find Him.[1]

We must trust in the goodness of God; trust in God as our Father who will hear our cry, though we be but as children 'crying in the night': that all our striving is not wasted breath; that, in the full knowledge of the end, the progress towards it will be made clear;—

> that somehow good
> Will be the final goal of ill.
> . . . . . .
> That nothing walks with aimless feet;
> That not one life shall be destroy'd,
> Or cast as rubbish to the void,
> When God hath made the pile complete.[2]

Though the vision tarry, wait thou for it: because it will surely come, it will not tarry: but the Just shall live by faith.

To put the whole question in another form: the problem is, how to reconcile the existence of evil with any form of Theism whatever. To this question, it has been said, there are many replies, but no answer. 'Against this immovable barrier of the existence of evil the waves of philosophy have dashed themselves unceasingly since the birthday of human thought, and have retired broken and powerless, without displacing the minutest fragment of the stubborn rock, without softening one feature of its dark and rugged surface.'[3] In the pursuit of that systematic thought concerning the problems of experience which we call philosophy, we can continue satisfactory development along two lines, unifying diverse

[1] Browning: "A Grammarian's Funeral."
[2] "In Memoriam," liv.
[3] Mansel on the "Limits of Religious Thought," Lect. vii.

phenomena, ascertaining general laws behind particular examples, until we finally arrive at two universally-established and apparently clear principles. And here we suddenly come to a full stop. We have reduced everything to two fundamental propositions, and these appear mutually destructive. On the one hand, that the Universe is fundamentally perfect; on the other, the presence of imperfection: in theological language, the existence of God and the existence of evil. And apparently we can go no farther. We can retrace our steps along each line, without finding a flaw in any link in the chain; but placing one proposition against the other, both representing facts, we can see no possibility of subordinating the one to the other, or of including both in some higher synthesis. If the adoption of imperfection was necessary for the attainment of greater perfection, then God was not originally perfect. If the adoption of imperfection was not necessary, then why does imperfection exist? From this dilemma, to our finite intellects, there appears no way of escape.[1]

The same problem is presented in a thousand different ways wherever the two lines of reasoning, conflicting in their ultimate divergence, encounter each other on lower planes of thought. The direct experience of evil, innocent suffering, aimless pain, apparent waste, are all elements in the general proposition declaring the presence of imperfection in the world. Over against these can be set the effort of man, the consciousness of beauty and moral goodness, the continual strife after the ideal, the progress of humanity ever upward 'working out the beast' as if towards higher life, the passionate yearning towards 'the New Heavens and the New Earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.' And so at length we

[1] *Cf.* McTaggart: "Studies in Hegelian Dialectic"—"The relation of the Dialectic to Time."

arrive at a blank outlook, and realise that, with our present limited imperfect knowledge, intellectual consideration will carry us no farther.

Tennyson declines to be content with this impossible conclusion. He clearly recognises this knowledge, and the limitation of human intelligence. Yet he will not adopt the ready expedient of shutting his eyes to either set of facts. To take refuge in a blank atheism would be to neglect the one chain of reasoning. To refuse to acknowledge the evil of the world, and assert a blind optimism, would be to neglect the other. To suspend judgment, and refuse to commit oneself to either alternative, is impossible in a world where action is imperative: every word and deed, every conscious choice of daily life must depend implicitly, if not explicitly, on the decision which is accepted. We are compelled, by the conditions of our existence in a world of change, to act as if we had solved the problem; and the theoretical oscillation, which might be possible in a world of thought, becomes intolerable in a world of free choice between conflicting claims.

And here, Tennyson asserts, is the true sphere for the operation of faith. Faith furnishes the impulse and predominant motive demanded for action, by the bold assertion that, in some manner unknown to us, these contradictory propositions are reconcilable. It emphasises our refusal to shut our eyes to either facts of experience; but it trusts that in some higher unity, the nature of which we cannot even conceive, these two contrary propositions may be harmonised. To every man, to the determined Pyrrhonist or most convinced Sceptic, some measure of faith is necessary for the transition from his metaphysic to his practical philosophy. Recognise that evil possesses real existence, and we can assail it, and battle with it, and spend our lives in conflict with it; but for support

in this combat, and for motive in the long day's struggle, we must also maintain faith in the reality of goodness, and the unity of the world, and the ultimate triumph of righteousness. And although, intellectually, we may have no glimmerings of a possible harmony; yet if we are faithful to our belief we may find other reasons for adhering to it. Doubts will still trouble us; but deep in the human heart there will arise a conviction which no logical argument can destroy, a confident apprehension that 'all is well.' '*Le cœur a ses raisons,*' says Pascal; '*que la raison ne connaît pas.*'[1] In the love of the highest, in the basing of the whole life on the possibility of the reality of righteousness, in the assertion of the ultimate triumph of goodness, there will come to each one moments when he seems to see into the heart of things by direct spiritual insight; when the sickly cloud of doubt surrounding him is dispelled for a brief space, during which he can attain renewed strength for the continuance of that long 'battle in the mist,' where 'all of high and holy dies away.'

This, the central principle of Tennyson's teaching, is summed up and clearly expressed in that great poem in which he traces his own mental progress from doubts born of sorrow, through wild unrest, to ultimate peace. It is the principle to which he always eventually returns from 'the impotent conclusion of long-standing facts'; and its acceptance is his final word on the whole controversy. The thought of the poem advances in periodical rhythmic progress: doubts and difficulties, followed by an answer; more difficulties, again an answer; and, finally, a summary and conclusion of the whole matter. And in each of the answers, and in the final summary, the same result is attained; each essentially consists of an appeal from the hard logic of facts to that

[1] Pascal: "Pensees."

faith which refuses to acquiesce in the counsels of despair.

But there is in each case a definite advance from the preceding position; the confidence increases, the doubts become shaken; finally, 'steadfast rather than triumphant' at the close of the poem, although worn and wearied with the long struggle, faith remains master of the field.

The bald statement of the alternative, and the definite refusal to accept it, is the first result attained. Here is no trace of the subsequent note of victory; the poet simply turns away from the terrible doubt, casting himself blindly upon the 'great world's altar stairs'; stretching 'lame hands of faith' in the despairing hope of ultimately attaining light beyond the darkness. From overwhelming sorrow at the death of his friend, he passes to the consideration of death as Universal; and from the realisation of this inevitable destruction, to the contemplation of Nature, lending 'evil dreams,' apparently so careless of the single life. And then there rises before him the awful vision of a progress, not merely wasteful of the individual alone, but careless of the type also, in ceaseless change, in continual, apparently purposeless, production of new forms, developing, flourishing, and passing away. And so at length he is brought face to face with the final question — Is it all blind chance? Is man to perish in a similar manner? Shall he

> Man her last work, who seemed so fair,
> Such splendid purpose in his eyes,
> Who roll'd the psalm to wintry skies,
> Who built him fanes of fruitless prayer,
>
> Who trusted God was love indeed
> And love creation's final law—
> Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw
> With ravine, shriek'd against his creed.

Who loved, who suffer'd countless ills,
Who battled for the True, the Just,
Be blown about the desert dust,
Or seal'd within the iron hills?

No more? A monster then, a dream,
A discord. Dragons of the prime
That tare each other in their slime
Were mellow music match'd with him. [1]

And such is his first answer: to state the whole problem, and from the mere statement to obtain courage to resist a premature solution, which must be destructive of hope and paralysing to effort. The clear recognition of the alternatives throws him back on the assertion that, unless proved beyond the possibility of doubt, he will not accept the hopeless conclusion: that man, who possesses these capacities and potentialities, cannot heedlessly perish; that fate must demand a different answer, and a purpose 'behind the veil.'

And so he passes on, through many changes of thought and varied speculation, to his second reply to the difficulties surrounding him. The same process is here repeated: once again the individual is thrown back from 'the tokens so faint of a protecting Providence' in 'eagle's wing and insect's eye,' to the contemplation of the possibility of an 'ever-breaking shore that tumbled in the Godless deep.' And once again he definitely refuses to accept this solution of the enigma of human life. But the answer here is not, as in the first case, one of simple denial: experience has brought knowledge, and a clearer insight: the belief that all is not in vain has received confirmation other than that given by the logical reason: and it is now 'like a man in wrath' that the heart protests the faith by which the righteous shall be justified.

[1] "In Memoriam," lvi.

That which we dare invoke to bless;
Our dearest faith, our ghastliest doubt;
He, They, One, All: within, without;
The power in darkness whom we guess;

I found Him not in world or sun,
Or Eagle's wing, or insect's eye;
Nor thro' the questions men may try,
The petty cobwebs we have spun:

If e'er when faith had fall'n asleep,
I heard a voice 'believe no more,'
And heard an ever-breaking shore
That tumbled in the Godless deep;

A warmth within the breast would melt
The freezing reason's colder part,
And like a man in wrath the heart
Stood up and answered 'I have felt.'

No, like a child in doubt and fear;
But that blind clamour made me wise:
Then was I as a child that cries,
But, crying, knows his father near;

And what I am beheld again
What is, and no man understands;
And out of darkness came the hands
That reach thro' nature, moulding men.[1]

These stanzas sum up the fundamental principle of Tennyson's teaching. By the aid of this faith, sometimes triumphant, based on immediate conviction, sometimes weak and uncertain, almost overwhelmed by fresh manifestations of evil, but always maintained, never relinquished, never quite destroyed, Tennyson can sum up his great poem in words of direct triumphant appeal to that 'Immortal love' which he postulates behind the 'vain show of things.'

[1] "In Memoriam," cxxiv.

> Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
> Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
> By faith, and faith alone embrace
> Believing where we cannot prove;
> . . . . . .
> We have but faith: we cannot know;
> For knowledge is of things we see;
> And yet we trust it comes from Thee,
> A beam in darkness.[1]

This, then, was Tennyson's message. It was no new discovery, no suddenly announced gospel, carrying immediate conviction to all who listened. But it was accepted and reiterated despite facts and theories of the connections of facts which seemed to vitiate its conclusions. Established near to the commencement of his poetical career, it was maintained until the end with passionate emphasis as the only possible clue to the tangled maze of life. All his discussion and speculation concerning the nature of God, Self, or Immortality ultimately terminated in this position:—There are indications pointing to the existence of an all-perfect God, to the reality of the Self, to the Immortality of each individual personality. And then again there are facts of experience which seem directly to deny these possibilities. The only possibility is *faith* that these represent realities and not illusions; all other theories leave life meaningless, and effort vain. We must cling to the hope that some day we shall be answered and vindicated in our belief. The righteous shall live by his stedfastness: the just shall live by faith.

[1] "In Memoriam," Introduction.

IV. GOD

TO those who have once affirmed Spirit to be the reality of the Universe, who have definitely accepted the idealistic position as being the only position in any way reconcilable with the facts of the world, a further problem presents itself. A contest arises between the claims of the particular and the universal, the individual and the whole, the self and God. Are we to conceive as ultimate the selves, the personalities of which alone we are directly conscious? Or are we to attempt to resolve these into some more ultimate element? If we adopt the first course we are naturally led on to regard each individual as immortal, enduring, indestructible, beyond the influence of change, existing firm and unmoved amidst the ebb and flow of the transitory phenomena surrounding it. If we emphasise the second we acknowledge only God as real, and determine the individual self either as possessing no real existence, or as part of the One, the apparent separateness being a delusion caused by the subjective illusory forms of Time and Space; or as an emanation from the essential Spiritual reality, coming out from Him into the phantom world of phenomena and passing back to Him again in the extra-phenomenal world.

And so we can recognise two distinct tendencies in idealistic philosophy, according as the claims of God or the claims of self are emphasised. The former view has obtained the adherence of many great names, through many changing systems. It varies from the pantheism of Spinoza finding the existence of all things in God, to the modern idealism of Lotze apprehending God as

a personality and the Universe as an aesthetic unity but unable from this to deduce the immortality or permanence of the individual self. The former views the world of time and change as illusion, and regards the one unchangeable Substance beneath all things as alone real. The latter acknowledge a certain separateness in the conscious personality, but, asserting that the importance of any part lies solely in its relation to the whole, is compelled to acknowledge that only as necessary for the fulfilment of the plan of that whole will the individual come into being, and therefore that when no longer needed it will disappear for ever. On the other side, amongst those who have strenuously asserted the indubitable reality of the isolated self we find Leibniz with his developing monads, each real, each eternally existing, each for ever separate and alone; and Kant with his emphatic insistence, in the sphere of the practical reason, on the power of the unconditioned Will. The tendency of the former class is towards a pantheistic position, the sanction for morality being based on the ideal of the whole more than on the development of the individual, the 'harmony of things' rather than personal happiness. The tendency of the latter is to neglect or to deny the essential relation of the self to the whole, to found its ethical systems on the redressing of present inequalities in a future life, and as the goal of effort to look to the final perfection of the individual soul.

Of these two classes Tennyson by all his instincts was drawn towards the latter. The certain and absolute conviction of the reality of the self had first driven him to his spiritual philosophy. In a world where all else might be dreams and shadows he asserted with unshaken conviction the reality of the self here and now. This assertion from the nature of the case was unprovable by logical reasoning,

being the starting-ground of all reason, the one hypothesis necessary before reason could commence to operate. It was the re-echo of the '*Cogito, ergo sum*' of Descartes; or rather the granting of a more perfect certainty, based on the consciousness of the present existence of the whole personality, one and undivisible: more especially on that feeling which is most indubitably real: '*amo, ergo sum.*' I am, I love: loving, I know that I am: and this conviction no argument can move or destroy. This reality of self is the groundwork or basis of any further constructive belief; and no other principle possesses for Tennyson the same validity.

Descartes, after the assertion of the self, passed on to an assertion with equal certainty of God, as a reality of whose existence the self possessed clear and distinct ideas, and a consciousness no less firm and unchangeable. And since his day other thinkers, confronted with endless difficulties in their attempts by empirical reasoning to deduce the being of God, have fallen back on this 'illative sense,' on the direct intuition of His existence. "Of all points of faith," said a great contemporary of Tennyson, "the being of God is, to my own apprehension, encompassed with most difficulty, and yet borne in upon our minds with most power."[1] Tennyson could not re-echo this statement. It could not be said of him as was said of another that 'he at least . . . was very sure of God.'[2] Tennyson apprehended himself, here and now; he found himself drawn with passionate affection towards others like himself; through the reality of this love, he was assured of their existence also. But he appears to have possessed no direct consciousness of the permanent Being of God; the attitude of mind of those who are filled with the Divine Presence, who can live 'as ever in the Great Taskmaster's eye,' he could not follow; and

[1] Newman: "Apologia," p. 239. [2] Browning: "La Saisiaz."

the existence of a Personality behind phenomena, which he was compelled to maintain from ethical and moral considerations, never yielded to him that direct knowledge of the presence of God which has been an illuminating influence on so many of the greatest religious thinkers throughout all ages.

But Tennyson found, as all other inquirers have found, that it is impossible to rest in this mere affirmation of the reality of the personal self, in the midst of a world of inexplicable phenomena. He was compelled to go on searching, to attempt to explain the existence of this self, its power of choice, its consciousness of a moral law which it ought to obey, its history, its progress, its apparent final destruction. The knowledge of God does not come to him as a direct intuition, expressing absolute conviction despite contradictory appearances, but as a secondary deduction, obtainable only after long and painful journeyings, and 'by faith and faith alone' maintained. In this pilgrimage it was the intellectual craving for unity, the recognition of the impossibility of resting content in an unreconciled dualism which drove him forward.

Tennyson never appears to have experienced that desire for union with the Infinite Being who is the source of all life and the Guide of all mankind, which has driven so many along 'the road to God.' "My soul is athirst for God," is the cry of the Psalmist of old, "yea, even for the living God: when shall I come to appear before the presence of God?"[1] "Too late have I known Thee," is the lament of a modern thinker, "O Thou ancient Truth; too late have I found Thee, First and only Fair." This is a feeling alien to Tennyson; even in his firmest faith God remained for him but dimly apprehended, and symbolically only, under the conception of personality; never became a Presence with which he could enter into

[1] Psalm xlii.

relation, the satisfaction of the yearning and the desire of men.

It was the difficulties of life, 'the burden and the mystery . . . of all this unintelligible world,' which started him on his search for a solution. This search was intensified by the tremendous shock of the death of Arthur Hallam; the craving for light upon the meaning of this blow urged him forward to inquiry as to the possibility of the existence of an Eternal Justice, which should one day make 'the crooked straight, and the rough places plain.'

The premature death of his dearly-loved friend aroused him from acceptance of things as they appear and from acquiescence in orthodox explanations to face the realities of life; and in the long battle with doubt which resulted, Tennyson found himself compelled to abandon one after another the older statements of the proofs of the existence of God. 'Doubts of sorrow born,' gradually destroyed for him the validity of the arguments which might have satisfied him in times of ease and contentment. The evidence from teleology of a beneficent Creator, the interpretation of God in Nature as a reasoned proof from the goodness and skill and adaptation of means to ends, as formally stated proved powerless to withstand the new principles of evolution. Death, apparently purposeless, produced the fear whether Life itself may not be purposeless also, 'a striving and a striving and an ending in nothing.'

'The stars,' she whispers, 'blindly run';
A web is wov'n across the sky;
From out waste places comes a cry,
And murmurs from the dying sun:

'And all the phantom, Nature stands—
With all the music in her tone,
A hollow echo of my own,—
A hollow form with empty hands.'[1]

[1] "In Memoriam," iii.

Final causes appeared to him no longer discoverable in the world of phenomena, or only read into it by the anthropomorphic tendencies in the mind of man. Man has ends which he designs, by the conscious forecasting which is the motive-power and guide of his volition; Nature drifts on around him, indifferent, careless, apparently without purpose, or as if ruled by 'a maniac scattering dust.' Arthur Hallam had seemed fitted to take the highest place, to direct and influence the ways of men; a sudden chance shock and he had vanished without a cry. So all Nature seemed to regard with indifference the passions and strivings of men; no reasonable end was discernible in her action, but 'mere weather, doing and undoing without end.'

Nor could Tennyson find satisfaction in the other formal proofs of the existence of God. The ontological argument assumed the necessity of the conception of a Being comprehending all reality. And in later years this demonstration of God's existence had come into favour, as a premature attempt to find a common ground of reconciliation of all speculative creeds. Whatever is real, it was said, is God. Something is real; therefore something is God: an argument as logically indisputable as it was spiritually unsatisfying. God, for Tennyson, to satisfy the aspirations of man, and make life worth the living, must be something more than a name for whatever *is*; equally applicable to a 'God of Eternal Rage' or an 'idiot power' 'controlling a Fatherless Hell,'[1] or a limitless and soulless Universe drifting no whither through everlasting night.

From these proofs Tennyson was driven back to the assertion of the existence of God as necessary for the satisfaction of the demands of the human race. Voltaire's statement that If there be no God it would be necessary

[1] See "Despair."

to invent one, although enunciated first in a spirit of mockery, yet contains this germ of truth: that men cannot be content in a Godless Universe. With a clear acknowledgment that there is no purpose behind the changes of things, and no working towards an end, all striving must become aimless and life eventually intolerable. "What 'In Memoriam' did for us," says a great thinker, "was to impress on us the ineffaceable and ineradicable conviction that *humanity* will not and cannot acquiesce in a Godless world: the 'man in men' will not do this, whatever individual man may do, whatever they may temporarily feel themselves driven to do, by following methods which they cannot abandon to the conclusions to which these methods at present seem to lead."[1]

So that time after time we find Tennyson, confronted with the difficulties of life and the 'tokens so faint and broken of a superintending design,' suddenly throw his doubts from him and fall back on the simple assertion of faith and the appeal to the one that he feels is Lord of All.

> I falter where I firmly trod,
> And falling with my weight of cares
> Upon the great world's altar-stairs
> That slope thro' darkness up to God,
>
> I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope
> And gather dust and chaff, and call
> To what I feel is Lord of all,
> And faintly trust the larger hope.[2]

This trust is the only refuge from despair and self-inflicted escape from the persistent tragedy of life.

> My God, I would not live
> Save that I think this gross hard-seeming world
> Is our misshaping vision of the Powers
> Behind the world, that make our griefs our gains.[3]

[1] H. Sidgwick in Tennyson's "Life," vol. i. p. 302.
[2] "In Memoriam," lv. [3] "The Sisters."

'Take away belief in the self-conscious personality of God,' he said, 'and you take away the backbone of the world.' 'On God and God-like men we build our trust.' 'I should infinitely rather feel myself the most miserable wretch on the face of the earth with a God above, than the highest type of man standing alone.'[1] And this postulate of faith in the end becomes justified: the reaching out into the darkness is not without response from the region beyond; and the promise is as true now as when first delivered, 'If with all your hearts ye truly seek Me, ye shall ever surely find me.' The faith that is at first blind and despairing, gathering only 'dust and chaff,' by persistence and strenuous effort ultimately rises into something like a triumphant certainty, able to confront with calm steadfastness, the 'burden and the mystery' of the world. So that, at the end of the long search Tennyson can speak of the definite knowledge, asserted by his whole being, of

> That friend of mine who lives in God,
>
> That God, which ever lives and loves,
> One God, one law, one element,
> And one far-off divine event,
> To which the whole creation moves.[2]

Of the nature of God as Infinite Reality in whom all things live and move and have their being, Tennyson acknowledges that finite minds can have but imperfect comprehension. "'I dare hardly name His Name,' he would say, and accordingly he named Him in 'the Ancient Sage' the Nameless."[3] Only he would postulate that God must be at least equal to the highest development we know. The highest thing we know is human Personality: God must be at least personal. Although 'our little systems' are but 'broken lights' of the One eternal Being, yet in

[1] "Life," vol. i. p. 311. [2] "In Memoriam," Epilogue.
[3] "Life," vol. i. p. 311.

the highest manifestations of Personality, in the self which we now but imperfectly comprehend, we come nearest to the knowledge of that God who in His fulness must infinitely transcend any of our finite conceptions.[1] Reality cannot consist of blind impersonal forces, evolving the human consciousness by some chance arrangement, or 'collocations of matter in motion'; indeed, this hypothesis needs only to be clearly stated to be seen to carry in itself its own refutation. We are progressing towards God, not away from God: God may be supra-personal, He cannot be less than personal: He must comprehend in His ultimate Nature the fundamental principles of Personality. It is the materialist view which is unreal, an abstraction from data incompletely comprehended; Personality, in man or God, remains the reality of the Universe.

God, then, is affirmed by Tennyson to be perfect Truth, perfect Will, perfect Love; not a Demiurge dragged in to account for the start of the Material Universe and subsequently retiring from his handiwork, but a God who is ever present, ever working, sustaining all things, interested in His Creations, desiring their progress and their happiness and their love. "If God were to withdraw Himself for one single instant from this Universe," he once said, "everything would vanish into nothingness."[2] Just 'behind the veil,' if we could only see Him, God is working 'in the shadow keeping watch upon His own.'

> Speak to him thou for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit can meet—
> Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.[3]

But, as our conception of our own personalities is ever

[1] See "Life," vol. i. p. 312. [2] "Life of Tennyson," vol. i. p. 319.
[3] "The Higher Pantheism."

developing with a clearer realisation of our own powers, and even now is but imperfectly comprehended, so our conception of God must necessarily be limited, and cannot yet be regarded as final. As the consciousness of Personality widens and broadens to future generations, so also will widen and broaden the apprehension of God. God is a person; but He is not bound down by the limitations of human personality: He must infinitely transcend them. But, fundamentally, God must be symbolised to us as Knowledge, Power, Love. And, as it was the evidence of the last which gave to Tennyson the absolute conviction of His own personal existence, so it is this also that he would especially emphasise as the very vital Essence of the Divine Personality. God *does not* love. God *is* love. Love is of God: it is when we manifest love, that God is most 'manifest in us,' working in us to His own purposes. And it is his insistence on this view that enables Tennyson to claim the power of direct appeal to the infinite God, and to vindicate His title of 'Immortal Love.' This alone can give to the imperfect minds of men the right to demand help from the God 'who sitteth above the Cherubim and ruleth the courses of the stars.' And so we find Tennyson at the close of his long life confidently praying for knowledge and guidance from 'that Love which is and was my Father and my Brother and my God.'

Tho' sin too oft, when, smitten by Thy rod,
Rail at 'blind Fate' with many a vain 'Alas!'
From sin thro' sorrow into Thee we pass
By that same path our true forefathers trod;
And let not Reason fail me, nor the sod
Draw from my death Thy living flower and grass,
Before I learn that Love which is, and was
My Father, and my Brother, and my God!

Steel me with patience! soften me with grief!
Let blow the trumpet strongly while I pray,

Till this embattled wall of unbelief
My prison, not my fortress, fall away!
Then, if Thou willest, let my day be brief,
So Thou wilt strike Thy glory thro' the day.[1]

This note of triumph and passionate assertion is, indeed, rare in the poetry of Tennyson. For the most part he is content to cling in trust to 'the truths that never can be proved'; to the assertion of faith that God lives and works and loves behind the outward show of things; to the belief that all that is now difficult and obscure will one day be clearly revealed and justified.

But, in spite of his affirmation of the existence of God, his assertion of the real separate existence of the individual still remains. Reverence and Love and Trust are due from us: but Tennyson accepts no pantheistic system, denying individuality, or advocating the losing of the self in God. The personality remains: God will speak to it, guide it, finally bring it to Himself, in harmony with all things: but it is the self as in some inexplicable manner independent, with power of unconditioned choice, which can directly address its Creator;—

Hallowed be Thy name—Halleluiah!—
Infinite Ideality!
Immeasurable Reality!
Infinite Personality!
Hallowed be thy name.—Halleluiah!

We feel we are nothing—for all is Thou and in Thee;
We feel we are something—*that* also has come from Thee;
We know we are nothing—but Thou wilt help us to be.
Hallowed be thy name.—Halleluiah![2]

God, then, to Tennyson, is not some absentee ruler sitting

[1] "Doubt and Prayer." [2] "The Human Cry."

above the heavens, having set the machine of the Universe going and then withdrawn Himself: not simply a God of Infinite Power, whose mandates we are compelled dumbly to accept and blindly to obey. But he is a 'living God,' moving and working and sustaining all things, whose plan we can but dimly descry, whose purpose in the world we are unable to discover, but who is 'not far from any one of us,' who is guiding us imperceptibly, communing with us, reaching hands through the darkness and moulding us to His ends, who will ultimately bring us to Himself. The analogy of a machine once started is altogether false; the creative act and the sustaining act are the same. Identity through changes, as in our Personality, is present in the divine Personality: with God is an eternal Now: and yet God changes.

> But with the Nameless is nor Day nor Hour;
> Tho' we, thin minds, who creep from thought to thought,
> Break into 'Thens' and 'Whens' the Eternal Now.[1]

God is Will and Knowledge and Love: we can seek after Him in the arduous pursuit of Truth, in the search after beauty, in the hunger and thirst after righteousness. Beauty and Truth and Goodness are but different methods of apprehending Him, the reflection in our finite minds of that Glory, which no man can see unveiled and live.

And if proofs are demanded for this tremendous assumption, Tennyson can ultimately but throw us back on faith. Any other hypothesis of the reality of the world if once clearly stated becomes inconceivable. But with faith we shall obtain increasing insight: the times will become more numerous when we shall

> seem to hear a Heavenly Friend
> And through thick veils to apprehend
> A labour working to an end.[2]

[1] "The Ancient Sage." [2] "The Two Voices."

And through all our doubts and difficulties and 'the pain of this divisible-indivisible world,' there will come to each man also, if he clings to 'faith beyond the forms of faith,' moments of direct spiritual apprehension: moments when

> He feels he cannot die,
> And knows himself no vision to himself,
> Nor the high God a vision.[1]

In the light of this principle of faith, we can recognise a more definite advance in Tennyson's method of approaching the problem of the Material Universe. The naïve realism of the natural man assumes that the Unknown some thing outside himself consists of matter and space and motion, projections of abstractions of his own personality into the region beyond. But Tennyson continuously asserts that the nearest apprehension we can obtain of this Reality is by the projection of the whole personality outside ourselves, and not of some abstracted limited portion of it; that in asserting God to be personal, we are, at least, nearer to His ultimate nature, than in asserting only blind matter or force or motion. 'Everywhere throughout the Universe he saw the glory and greatness of God.'[2] The Eternal world is living, spiritual, alive. The material world is an illusion of the senses: Spirit is real, the Spiritual is around us and within us: death may be the liberation of the soul from these limitations, the breaking down of the division,

> Letting us pent up creatures through
> Into Eternity our due.[3]

All that we call the material world is merely the vision in our imperfect minds, the 'broken gleams' and 'stifled splendour,' of the glory of God.

[1] "The Holy Grail." [2] "Life," vol. i. p. 312.
[3] "Dis Aliter Visum" (Browning).

> The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills and the plains—
> Are not these, O Soul, the Vision of Him who reigns?
> . . . . . .
> Earth, these solid stars, this weight of body and limb,
> Are they not sign and symbol of thy division from Him?[1]

God is no longer relegated to some 'region beyond the fixed stars.' He is around us, close to us, manifesting Himself to us through the senses, speaking directly to our souls, although 'the ear of men cannot hear' the music of the world, and 'the eye of man cannot see' the fulness of the Vision.

Were the spiritual principle behind the material Universe for one moment withdrawn, the farthest star and vastest sun, as well as the tiniest flowers, would crumble at once into nothingness.

> And if the Nameless should withdraw from all
> Thy frailty counts most real, all thy world
> Might vanish like a shadow in the dark.[2]

Some day for each of us, the heavens will roll away disclosing the eternal world behind them: that world whose ruler is God, and whose sustaining power is Love.

> The pain
> Of this divisible-indivisible world
> Among the numerable-innumerable
> Sun, sun, and sun, thro' finite-infinite space,
> In finite-infinite Time—

will then be clearly apprehended, as being merely

> Our mortal veil
> And shatter'd phantom of that infinite One,
> Who made Thee unconceivably Thyself
> Out of His whole World-self and all in all.[3]

[1] "The Higher Pantheism." [2] "The Ancient Sage."
[3] "De Profundis."

V. SELF

WE have seen that the principle upon which Tennyson bases all his subsequent religious speculation is the affirmation of the certain reality of the self. 'I am I,' the starting-point of modern philosophy, he reasserts, with unshakable conviction: and all attempts to explain this direct intuition as an illusion leave him unmoved. This self thus apprehended is not a temporary manifestation of an absolute Spirit, a bubble on the surface, breaking and vanishing away: not a wave or aura, accompanying without influencing the real world of material change; it is the one and only thing of which by direct conviction we can assert reality. God may be incomprehensible; the world around us may be some strange disordered dream; 'all that seems' may 'suffer shock'; I am I; I remain persistent throughout change, the only indisputable fact in a world where all else may be shadow.

And the self thus experienced is not apprehended through cognition alone, as the permanent Subject to which all changing thought must be referred; it is recognised as the whole indivisible personality; and the self as feeling, and the self as willing, Tennyson especially emphasises. Through feeling, through love, we first awake to the consciousness of our own personality. This knowledge of self first clearly discerned through awakening love is depicted in symbolic imagery in one of his earliest poems. The Lady of Shalott, heedless of the changeful, moving life outside her casement, weaves magic shapes in the mirror that hangs before her all the year; and, seeing only dim reflections of the great world beyond, becomes 'half sick of shadows.' Until at length the 'new-

born love for something . . . takes her out of the region of shadows into that of realities,'[1] and with the birth of this new experience the old dream-world of fancy is shattered to fragments, and the old life perishes for ever. And so throughout all Tennyson's poetry the consciousness of love provides for him a guarantee of the reality of his being: the strength of his affection, and the depth of his feeling, yield him, the firmest conviction of his own personal reality.

But the power of Will is also an essential part of the self; in volition the 'I' is also manifest, striving to realise itself in the external world: and free choice, of which we each possess the immediate certainty, remains for Tennyson an ultimate fact which we cannot resolve into anything more fundamentally simple. This freedom, unconditioned by the material world around each individual, lifts him above and beyond the influence of his surroundings. By the power of this free choice man can formulate his own ends of action, accepting the good, rejecting the evil: and no external influences can destroy this gift. If this doctrine of free will clashes with the mechanical conception of a world of causal necessity, the conflict proves that the mechanical scheme, although useful, is incomplete; for we each possess in our own selves a direct certitude of our own power of choice, which no system of laws deducible from phenomena can destroy. This power is that

> Living Will that shalt endure
> When all that seems shall suffer shock;[2]

and it is by 'this main miracle' of the choice of the will between good and evil that the character is fashioned and the soul progresses. By the deliberate choosing of the highest we gradually bring our wills more into

[1] "Life of Tennyson," vol. i. p. 117. [2] "In Memoriam," cxxxi.

accordance with the Divine Will, and grow nearer and nearer to God.

> Live thou! and of the grain and husk, the grape
> And ivy berry, choose; and still depart
> From death to death thro' life and life, and find
> Nearer and ever nearer Him, who wrought
> Not Matter, nor the finite-infinite,
> But this main miracle, *that thou art thou,*
> *With power on thine own act and on the world.*[1]

"Assuredly, however unfathomable the mystery, if one cannot believe in the freedom of the human will, as of the Divine, life is hardly worth having."[2] Tennyson was willing to acknowledge the limitations of this freedom; of the fact itself he was never doubtful. "Man's free will is but a bird in a cage," he said; "he can stop at the lower perch or he can mount to a higher. Then that which is and knows will enlarge his cage, give him a higher and a higher perch, and at last break off the top of his cage and let him out to be one with the Free Will of the Universe."[3]

Self as knowing, the subject to which all thought must be referred, and without which thought itself becomes inexplicable; self as feeling and loving, reaching outside itself towards those personalities of which it can possess no direct knowledge; self as willing, making its own ends and striving for their attainment: these form the three indivisible elements of that Ego which in its fulness we cannot at present comprehend, but of whose existence we are directly aware by an intuition which no argument can destroy.

And this conviction of the reality of his own individual self came to acquire additional strength for Tennyson from certain mystical states, of which, at intervals during

[1] "De Profundis." [2] "Life of Tennyson," vol. i. p. 317.
[3] "Life of Tennyson," vol. i. p. 318.

his life he seems to have possessed immediate experience. In these trance stages with the apparently partial withdrawal of consciousness from the bodily habitation he appeared to see with direct, inward vision, into the heart of things. They were comparable to the state of ecstacy described by Plotinus and the older mystics, as communion with the One Soul of the Universe, accompanied by an apprehension of the region beyond that phenomenal product of consciousness which we term the visible world. Allusions to this experience are scattered throughout his poetry: and, in a statement made by himself, he affirms them to be based on personal knowledge. In the 'Holy Grail' his hero King confesses that to him also, many a time, 'visions come'—

> Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,
> This light that strikes his eyeball is not light,
> This air that smites his forehead is not air
> But vision.[1]

And Tennyson returns to these 'visions' again, and interprets them as yielding direct evidence of the reality of the self, and the possibility of its future intercourse with the 'Nameless' in the 'Ancient Sage':—

> More than once when I
> Sat all alone, revolving in myself
> The word that is the symbol of myself,
> The mortal limit of the Self was loosed,
> And past into the Nameless, as a cloud
> Melts into Heaven. I touch'd my limbs, the limbs
> Were strange, not mine—and yet no shade of doubt,
> But utter clearness, and thro' loss of self
> The gain of such large life as matched with ours
> Were sun to spark.[2]

And in his own words he describes this state "utterly

[1] "The Holy Grail." [2] "The Ancient Sage."

beyond words" as a kind of waking trance. 'This has generally come upon me through repeating my own name two or three times to myself silently, till all at once, as it were, out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being; and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality seeming no extinction but the only true life."[1]

This trance experience, usually confined to devotees of mystical religion, but not uncommonly found in the lives of great poets, had a marked influence on Tennyson's view of the self, as providing him an additional guarantee of its spiritual worth, and a conviction of its ultimate reality. The self passes for the moment from the sensible world into the supersensible, the outward world so largely its own product fading for a moment from its vision; and in this passage it obtains direct consciousness of the spiritual region beyond. Or, it is as if it woke for a moment from the dream of life, before settling down to dream again. These are only feelings, it may be urged, vague emotions, mystical states which cannot appeal to reason. Yet they are feelings which yield indubitable certainty beyond their own duration; which have come to many in time past, and provided them with a basis for action; which can yield sufficient certitude of the truth of their teaching, to induce men to venture life upon their lessons. And they are feelings carrying with them such intensity of conviction that, to those who possess them, any further doubt as to the reality of the personality as a spiritual consciousness becomes an almost 'laughable impossibility.'

[1] "Life of Tennyson," vol. i. p. 320.

These mystical states may then be visions: but 'dreams are true while they last, and do we not live in dreams?' It is only for the sake of the dreams that visit it, says Tennyson, that this world of shifting phenomena has any value for us; nay, is not this the reality, and life itself the dream: so that when all this outward show has vanished, leaving 'not a rack behind,' the self shall endure beyond the reach of time and the shocks of change.

And so this firm statement of the reality of personality here and now leads on to further considerations. 'To-day: but what of yesterday?' What of the past and of the future? How has this self, now so indubitably real, attained to its present condition; and what shall be its future fate? 'Whence? O Heavens, whither?' These are the questions always lurking in the background of consciousness, and perpetually clamouring for some answer. Shall we assert, with Carlyle, 'Science knows not; thought knows not; only that it is from mystery to mystery, from God and to God'?[1] Or shall we suspend judgment and say that the present at least is real, whatever the past may have offered, or the future may bring? Or shall we definitely maintain the phenomenal nature of consciousness as an accompaniment of molecular change, growing and developing with bodily development, fading with the dissolution of the material elements at death, the whole phantom procession of human life resolving itself into

> A life of nothings, nothing-worth,
> From that first nothing ere his birth
> To that last nothing under earth?[2]

Now the individual consciousness, Tennyson asserts, as we apprehend it in the present, or rather in the

[1] "Sartor Resartus." [2] "Two Voices."

immediate past (for the actual present is for ever unknown to us), is the most entirely separate and isolated thing we know. The world outside ourselves, as viewed by the conscious mind, presents a certain unity ; some connection is, at least, apprehended between its separate parts ; without this connection all science, all knowledge, would be impossible. But the individual mind is apart. No other minds can directly affect it. Through nerve change and bodily sensation, indeed, currents flow inwards from the sense organs towards us ; and in some mysterious, inexplicable manner originate changes in the individual consciousness. 'Hidden away in the dark chamber of the skull,' these currents come into contact with some incomprehensible entity, and produce mental changes. But with other personalities the self has no direct relation. All communication, all intercourse, must be performed by clumsy sign language, by changes projected outward into the phenomenal world, to be re-interpreted from this into terms of mental change again. No man ever saw into another man's mind. 'In stern and bitter moments of life we are each of us alone.'

What then of the past and the future? Is this self eternally and timelessly One, unique, peculiar, forever separate? or is it part of a spiritual consciousness only differentiated in this material world, here developing personality, afterwards to be re-absorbed into the Universal? Is it, that is to ask, an entity passing out from an original state of Unity into a real diversity, traversing the world of time and change, ultimately again returning to Unity? Or is the world of Space and Time and Causality the illusion, and the spiritual Universe as at present existing in reality, one and undivided behind it all?

Upon these great questions the statements of Tennyson are somewhat vague and uncertain, and his opinion

appears to waver at different periods. He refused to acknowledge the purely natural development of the individual soul; and holding as he did most firmly to the belief in its spiritual continuance after death, he was compelled to assume also some kind of a spiritual existence before birth. Spirit is not, indeed, a new creation at the birth of each individual. Yet it exhibits progress and development; the time-process is a process of real change, and not an illusion. So that at first Tennyson was content to insist on the possibility of a spiritual prenatal life, without attempting to distinguish whether this was in the Individual or the Universal soul. Early in his poetical career, when confronted with doubts as to the future survival of the human personality, he attempted to answer them by the assertion of the probability of its pre-existence, based on certain spiritual intuitions:—

> Yet how should I for certain hold,
> Because my memory is so cold,
> That I first was in human mould?
> . . . . .
> It may be that no life is found,
> Which only to one engine bound
> Falls off, but cycles always round.
> . . . . .
> Moreover, something is or seems,
> That touches me with mystic gleams,
> Like glimpses of forgotten dreams—
>
> Of something felt, like something here;
> Of something done I know not where;
> Such as no language may declare.[1]

And this emphasis upon the Platonic doctrine Tennyson supports by evidence somewhat parallel to that advanced by Wordsworth in his famous 'Intimations of Immortality.' This is the direct experience of certain emotional states of

[1] "The Two Voices."

mind, giving him the suggestion of the possibility of a transcendental knowledge. In the 'vague feelings of delight' and wonder 'in gazing up an Alpine height'; in the unique inexplicable thrill of conviction of the present having been previously experienced; in the recognition of places never before visited; in that strong yearning sense arising occasionally in all of us of being on the brink of some great discovery almost apprehended, similar to the strain of incomplete reminiscence in actual memory, Tennyson found evidence and indications of the self's previous existence. In his earliest poems he describes certain emotional states when he appeared to

> Ebb into a former life, or seem
> To lapse far back in some confused dream
> To states of mystical similitude;
> If one but speaks or hems or stirs his chair,
> Ever the wonder waxeth more and more,
> So that we say 'All this hath been before,
> All this hath been, I know not when or where.'[1]

In 'The Ancient Sage,' again, where Tennyson expresses his mature convictions concerning some of the deepest problems of life, he advances as an example of the 'gleams of more than mortal things,' which the young poet scornfully admitted, his own experience of the 'Passion of the Past,' the inexplicable feeling of something 'lost and gone,' roused by the beauty of the Natural World.

> The first grey streak of earliest Summer-dawn,
> The last long stripe of waning crimson gloom,
> As if the late and early were but one—
> A height, a broken grange, a grove, a flower
> Had murmurs 'Lost and gone and lost and gone!'
> A breath, a whisper—some divine farewell

[1] "Early Sonnets," i.

> Desolate sweetness—far and far away—
> What had he loved, what had he lost, the boy?[1]

And late in his life the mystical intuitions yielded by the sight of distant horizons and far spaces and the sound of evening bells appeared to him as a voice from 'o'er the gates of birth.'

> A whisper from his dawn of life: a breath
> From some fair dawn beyond the doors of death.[2]

an emotion similar to that of Wordsworth, when 'in a season of calm weather' he discerns sight

> Of that immortal sea
> Which brought us hither:
> Can in a moment travel thither:
> And see the children sporting on the shore
> And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.[3]

But throughout 'In Memoriam' when he commenced under the pressure of doubts born of sorrow systematically to consider the whole question, he was inclined to emphasise the original Unity, the spiritual principle in man becoming divided into separate units in the world of sense and time; and to recognise as one of the main purposes of life the differentiation of this into the developing personalities of individuals in the gradual progress, both of the single man and of the race, towards self-consciousness. The baby, at first regarding things as all one, learns by degrees 'the use of I and me' and finds that he is other than the things he touches; and so, through the teaching of experience, rounds to a separate mind

> As thro' the frame that binds him in
> His isolation grows defined.

[1] "The Ancient Sage." [2] "Far-Far-Away."
[3] Wordsworth: "Ode on Intimations of Immortality in Childhood."

This use may lie in blood and breath,
Which else were fruitless of their due,
Had man to learn himself anew
Beyond the second birth of death.[1]

Yet again in his later poems he reiterates his conviction of the spiritual origin of the human personality; while at the same time the nature of its pre-existence, whether individual or universal, he leaves as a problem of which we have no means of solution.

Thus, in the 'De Profundis,' perhaps on the whole the most important of all his religious poems, suggested by the thoughts arising at the birth of his eldest child, he emphasises the double nature and double origin of the individual, material and spiritual—the material body ultimately traceable back to that vast seething mass of nebulous matter from which, according to modern science, the earth arose:—

Out of the deep, my child, out of the deep,
Where all that was to be, in all that was,
Whirl'd for a million aeons through the vast
Waste dawn of multitudinous-eddying light—
Out of the deep, my child, out of the deep,
Through all this changing world of changeless law,
And every phase of ever-heightening life,
And nine long months of ante-natal gloom,
. . . thou comest darling boy.[2]

And at the same time he greets the soul coming 'out of the deep' 'from that true world within the world we see, whereof our world is but the bounding shore,' passing from the Spiritual realm into the 'prison of the flesh' in the material world.

[1] "In Memoriam," xlv. [2] "De Profundis."

> For in the world which is not ours, They said
> 'Let us make man' and that which should be man,
> From that one light no man can look upon,
> Drew to this shore lit by the suns and moons
> And all the shadows.[1]

So that even to the end Tennyson gives no definite answer to the question. But all his later speculation on the subject became modified and coloured by the influence of two factors. One was his clearer and clearer apprehension of the principle of Evolution, and its application in the spiritual, as well as in the material world. The other was the accumulation of evidence which seemed to him to show that the individual personality was not so entirely cut off from direct communication with other conscious spirits as he had at first asserted; that not only the Eternal power behind Things, but also the personalities of the living and the dead, may directly communicate with each other by other channels than those of the senses; that some common connection between minds could be provisionally assumed; and hence the hypothesis strengthened of a common origin and a common end. Under the influence of these two theories his conception of the present condition and future progress of personality became widened and deepened; and this result reacted upon his whole theory of the nature and condition of the self. The influence of these speculations, however, can best be estimated after an examination of Tennyson's treatment of the question of the possibility of the persistence of human consciousness beyond the grave

[1] "De Profundis."

VI. IMMORTALITY

OF the three ultimate subjects of religious speculation, God, Self, Immortality, it was the third which Tennyson made most completely his own, and defended most strenuously against doubt and denial. Belief in a future existence appeared to him essential to the continued upward development of the human race. The survival of the individual personality after death was the fundamental principle of all his teaching; upon this alone did he find it possible to establish a practical system of ethics, and a faith in the moral government of the world: with this belief destroyed, the whole of his religion would crumble away. Life without striving for something beyond life is to him life 'without hope and without God in the world,' 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.' If, as one class of thinkers confidently anticipate, belief in personal immortality becomes universally repudiated by the progressive races of Europe, the poetry of Tennyson may still be studied for the charm of its style, and the marvellous felicity of its language; but the teaching of Tennyson, based on an altogether erroneous hypothesis of the conditions and possibilities of human life, will be discovered to possess but little of permanent value.

Early in his life the question of immortality appears to have been troubling him, producing the sadness noticeable throughout all the gorgeous description of natural beauty in his juvenile poems. As is customary with youth suddenly aroused to the consciousness of the inevitable approach of 'quick coming death' it is the mere physical accessories which first impress him with a morbid attraction,

the 'heavy clod' and the 'sharp headed worm' and 'the gross blackness underneath'; and it is in terror of these that he appeals to the 'Lord of All' for light on the insoluble mystery.

> Let thy love
> Shadow me over, and my sins
> Be unremember'd, and Thy Love
> Enlighten me. Oh teach me yet
> Somewhat before the heavy clod
> Weighs on me, and the busy fret
> Of that sharp-headed worm begins
> In the gross blackness underneath.[1]

Later he describes the sorrow at this time cast upon his life by the shadow whose reality seemed attested by the evidence of the senses, and the knowledge of the destruction and decay of the mortal body.

> I found him when my years were few;
> A shadow on the graves I knew,
> And darkness in the village yew.
>
> From grave to grave the shadow crept:
> In her still place the morning wept:
> Touch'd by his feet the daisy slept.
>
> The simple senses crowned his head:
> 'Omega! thou art Lord,' they said,
> 'We find no motion in the dead.'[2]

And yet, even in this earlier time, before death and the problems aroused by death had loomed so large in his mind as to exclude consideration of all other questions, he refused to accept the verdict of the senses as the final decision; and attempted to find escape from it in the ex-

[1] "Confessions of a Sensitive Mind."
[2] "The Two Voices"

pectation of a continued existence common to all humanity, and the universal longing for a future life.

> Why, if man rot in dreamless ease,
> Should that plain fact, as taught by these,
> Not make him sure that he shall cease?
> . . . . .
> He owns the fatal gift of eyes,
> That read his spirit blindly wise,
> Not simple as a thing that dies.
>
> Here sits he shaping wings to fly;
> His heart forebodes a mystery:
> He names the name Eternity.[1]

That Tennyson should thus, in his earliest speculations, have attempted to throw off the weight of the evidence for mortality, was inevitable from the nature of his mind. For he was one of those in whom the sense of vigorous personality was developed to a far fuller intensity than in the majority of mankind; and, in consequence, one to whom the possibility of death being annihilation seemed all the more repugnant. To many, indeed, such a consummation appears not only inevitable but desirable. "No blessings that could be bestowed upon me," said a modern scientist, "could compensate for the intolerable burden of continued existence." To those animated with feelings such as these the conviction is welcome that 'we shall sleep tranquilly through the hazardous future as we slept tranquilly through the raging past.' The 'grim suspicion' has "stolen into many a heart, that we do in truth feel within us, as years go by, a mortality of spirit as well as flesh: that the 'bower of unimagined flower and tree' withers inevitably into a frozen barrenness from which no new life can spring."[2] And the thought of a modern poet, representing half scornfully the final result of the satiation of desire, but expresses the hope and the longing of whole nations and races of men.

[1] "The Two Voices." [2] Myers: "Modern Poets and Cosmic Law."

From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be
That no life lives for ever;
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.[1]

To this feeling Tennyson seemed always to have been a stranger. It is an emotion found either in those with weak personalities, unable to confront and successfully encounter the not-self outside them; or in those who, being sated with manifold experience of all forms of passionate pleasure and finding all alike unsatisfying, loathe themselves and life, and crave only for utter silence and rest.

I give the fight up: let there be an end,
A privacy, an obscure nook for me,
I want to be forgotten even by God.[2]

To neither of these two classes did Tennyson belong. Often, indeed, as we see both in his life and in his poetry, 'he longed eagerly for death':[3] but it was as an escape from some active evil, overwhelming sorrow, the inextricable tangle of the world, or the bitterness of the memory of irrecoverable things. Desire simply for rest from the fitful fever of life; that craving for extinction which comes upon nations in their later degeneration, and in Modern Europe has been made the basis of a new system of philosophy; the abandonment of the struggle, and the grateful turning to sleep 'like a tired child': such feelings never to any appreciable extent influenced Tennyson's life or his poetry. All through

[1] Swinburne: "The Garden of Proserpine."
[2] Browning: "Paracelsus."
[3] See "Life of Tennyson," vol. i. p. 109.

his doubts and difficulties he realised that the cure for the evils of existence is Life and not death: a wider, deeper consciousness, the strengthening and intensifying of the personality to enable it to meet the world outside it, and freely to continue along its appointed course of change.

> Whatever crazy sorrow saith,
> No life that breathes with human breath
> Has ever truly longed for death.
>
> 'Tis life, of which our nerve was scant,
> Oh life not death, for which we pant;
> More life, and fuller, that I want.[1]

The same suggestion of the same remedy for the evils of a declining civilisation as that which carried Christianity forward in its earliest triumphs. "We that are in this tabernacle do groan being burdened," said St Paul. But he found the remedy not in the cessation of the struggle but in renewal of the power of endurance: "not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, *that mortality might be swallowed up in life.*"[2]

Death, however, in Tennyson's earlier speculation has little of that harsh reality which it afterwards possessed for him. To the young and healthy annihilation is something inconceivable; they know directly what life means; they cannot know, they cannot have any conception, of the meaning of the word Death. Non-existence for them appears merely 'an absurd impossibility.' So that in the earlier poems of Tennyson we find the question merely touched upon, glanced at, and passed by. Their subject-matter is made up of classical and romantic studies, attempted interpretations of the Grecian spirit and the romance of the Middle Ages, characterised by a search after beauty in all its varied manifestations; with

[1] "The Two Voices." [2] 2 Cor. v. 4.

in each a hint of the possibility behind all of 'quick coming death' intensifying the eagerness of the search after beauty; and, in the background, the knowledge of 'that deep grave to which I go,' and that 'all things must die.'

But this was suddenly changed by the death of Arthur Hallam in 1833. It was like a bolt from the blue sky, forcing the question upon the poet with rude and startling abruptness. Without a moment's warning, in 'Vienna's fatal walls,'

> God's finger touched him, and he slept.

The friendship was of an intensity rarely found in modern life: a community of spirit in which the one seemed to become almost a part of the other. All their thoughts, dreams, and aspirations, for the present and the future, were shared together. It seemed an affection that might defy the shocks of time and the finger of change. Then something intervened; the 'fair companionship' was broken; and the man he loved was suddenly hurried out of sight. Death was striking visibly in a manner which drove his whole being into revolt and fierce protest; not coming as a welcome friend at the close of the long day's toil, to round off and complete a well-spent life; not as the reply to persistent prayer for relief from the burden of existence; but unasked for and unbidden, defying, mocking, as it were, the intensity of the love between them, striking at the 'human-hearted man' with all his genius just unfolding, with unfathomed possibilities, with limitless affections and ambitions and desires, stricken down without warning, and swept into the darkness without a cry. One moment the two spirits were growing together without a barrier between them; the next one had disappeared for ever and no answer remained. Here was death indeed in its most intolerable

form; and here was a question which threatened sanity and reason, and clamoured ceaselessly for answer.

The death of Arthur Hallam left Tennyson under a cloud 'which for a while blotted out all joy from his life and made him long for death.'[1] The shock was overpowering, destroying at first all hope and interest in the world. It was only after the first numbness had passed off that his mind awoke to the problems which he must grapple with until he could find some solution compatible alike with the demand of the intellect and the passionate craving of the heart. With the restoration of the circulation came the renewal of pain: and all the questions, apparently unanswerable, imperatively demanded an answer. Henceforth, like 'Paul with beasts' he must 'fight with death,' until he can obtain some reply to the question, and discern some faint glimmering of light beyond the veil of darkness that at present threatened for ever to obscure his vision.

What did it all mean? What had become of that friend, and that friendship which seemed to have 'mastered time'? What was the fate of all those powers, apparently wasted? Was it all blind chance, or was there some inscrutable purpose behind it? Was death destruction, or simply removal to another sphere, and, if this latter, was there any manifestation of its existence, or any possibility of communication with the spirits of those who had passed 'behind the veil'? Revolving such questions in his mind, Tennyson searched around him for any evidence which would throw light on this great problem: considered the arguments which have been advanced on the one side or the other: and only after long periods of despair, and journeyings in strange places, finally arrived at his conclusions.

The history of the travail of a human soul is displayed

[1] "Life of Tennyson," vol. i. p. 109.

in that volume of poems, covering the experience of many years, entitled 'In Memoriam.' This is the real object of the work; doubts of many kinds arise, but they are the doubts born of sorrow; speculation takes place in many fields of inquiry; but all revolve around, and ultimately return to, the same question—the question of Immortality, of personal survival beyond the grave.

And the only answer that Tennyson could at length give is the assertion of this survival by his whole personality. All through his spiritual progress this had been his attitude. Doubts had come to him, but he had always fought them: difficulties seemed insuperable: there had been periods when 'faith had fallen asleep': but he never once definitely accepted the other possible alternative, never passed through a stage when he actually disbelieved in Immortality. Faith lives at the end as at the beginning; the definite refusal to acquiesce in any other solution; the clutching at the conviction that there is a purpose underlying all changes, and a life beyond death. Reason at the end might emphasise this belief, instead of opposing it; and the faint glimmer of a light, after sinking to a dull spark, might rise ultimately to a clear and steady flame. But never was this spark of faith extinguished; never did Tennyson adopt the attitude of negation. Personal survival may not be probable; it was a truth that 'never could be proved'; no certain answer came from 'behind the veil' to all our desperate inquiry; the one indubitable fact appeared to be the disappearance of the human spirit and the decay and crumbling into dust of the mortal body: no arguments, however logical, could overcome the evidence of the reality of this awful change. Yet Tennyson maintained the necessity for the rejection of this suggestion. At least, until 'some voice that we can trust' shall finally proclaim its falsity, we must cling to the 'larger Hope': must base our whole scheme of

life on the possibility that 'earthly flower will be heavenly fruit,' and that powers and aspirations here stunted, and maimed, and apparently destroyed by death, will ultimately find their full development. The attitude of faith on this subject is the only attitude compatible with mental sanity; and the final conclusion is the belief that

> We may lift from out of dust
> A voice as unto Him that hears,
> A cry above the conquered years
> To one that with us works, and trust,
>
> With faith that comes of self-control,
> The truths that never can be proved
> Until we close with all we loved
> And all we flow from, soul in soul.[1]

We must briefly consider the lines of thought which assisted Tennyson to this faith in the future existence of the human spirit. And first it is noteworthy that the belief in immortality founded on the evidence for the truth of the Revelation of Christianity and the promises of Christ never seemed to yield him satisfaction. The 'sure and certain Hope' based on the conviction that Jesus Christ had triumphed over death and had promised a similar victory to His followers afforded little consolation to Tennyson in his pilgrimage of sorrow. 'The cardinal point of Christianity,' he said once, 'is the life after death':[2] and it was on account of the assertion by the Christian creed of the reality of that life, in a fuller and more unqualified manner than in the creed of any other of the great religions of the world, that Tennyson maintained his allegiance to its teaching. But it never seemed to him to provide evidence for immortality, sufficient to raise

[1] "In Memoriam," cxxxi.

[2] "Life," vol. i. p. 321.

this belief to the level of a living faith able of itself to give the consolation of the promise of the life beyond. At the conclusion of 'In Memoriam' he can indeed appeal to that 'Immortal Love' who was Lord of death as well as of life:

> . . . And lo, thy foot
> Is on the skull which thou hast made.
>
> Thou wilt not leave us in the dust:
> Thou madest man, he knows not why,
> He thinks he was not made to die;
> And Thou hast made him: Thou art just.[1]

But this is a summary of results obtained by other lines of thought. The natural arguments for survival appeal to Tennyson more than the so-called supernatural; and it is noticeable and perhaps somewhat strange that he found little real help from evidence which has provided comfort and consolation and final triumph over sorrow to thousands suddenly bereaved of all that made life dear to them—faith in the words of Him who 'cannot lie': "I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

The first and most important evidence of belief in the future continuance of the individual, is for Tennyson provided by the inexpugnable conviction of the reality of the self, and the reality of love. I am: I cannot conceive of myself as non-existent. I love: not a mere temporary collocation of changing atoms, gathered up for a moment from the dust, and returning into the dust again; but a living, thinking, self, one who can respond to my love, a spirit that cannot die. My love is as real to-day, so many

[1] "In Memoriam," Introduction.

years after he has gone from my sight, as when I first shared his daily companionship, and held unfettered intercourse with my friend.

> Peace let it be! For I loved him, and love him for ever: the dead are not dead but alive.[1]

And this consciousness of the reality of his love persisting through change became afterwards strengthened for Tennyson by the conviction that he had held actual communion with the spirits of the dead. We could not see them with the eyes of the flesh: they had gone for ever from our bodily presence; but beyond the world of sense, in the spiritual region which more and more came for Tennyson to be the only reality, they still lived, and still remembered their former state, and still watched over and influenced their friends 'pent up' in the prison of the body. In one famous passage he attempts to describe the experience of one of these moments of communion:—

> So word by word, and line by line,
> The dead man touched me from the past,
> And all at once it seem'd at last
> His living soul was flash'd on mine,
>
> And mine in this was wound, and whirl'd
> About empyreal heights of thought,
> And came on that which is, and caught
> The deep pulsations of the world.[2]

And although he partially drew back from the full consequences of the tremendous assumption here made,[3] yet he still maintained that close to him, just behind the curtain of the visible world, was the Spiritual Universe and he could still address his unseen friend in words of direct appeal to one who is very near to him, and watches

[1] "Vastness." [2] "In Memoriam," xcv. 1st edition.
[3] "*His* living soul" was subsequently changed to "*The* living Soul.'

'like God . . . with larger other eyes than ours' the progress of human life.

> Be near me when my light is low,
> When the blood creeps, and the nerves prick
> And tingle; and the heart is sick,
> And all the wheels of Being slow.
>
> Be near me when the sensuous frame
> Is rack'd with pangs that conquer trust;
> And Time, a maniac scattering dust
> And Life, a Fury slinging flame.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Be near me when I fade away,
> To point the term of human strife,
> And on the low dark verge of life
> The twilight of Eternal day.[1]

But the chief consideration which induced Tennyson to cling to faith in immortality, and the argument which he asserts almost defiantly throughout the remainder of his poetical career, is the impossibility of the deliberate acceptance of the negative belief. If there be any meaning to the world, he says, immortality must be assured; for life, regarded simply as life terminating in death, yields no meaning whatever. All the evidences that point towards developing powers in man: all the faint indications of a purposeful power working towards a beneficent end; all the manifestations of beauty, and order, and law, become empty and meaningless, if man perishes utterly at death. The Universe ceases to bear any intelligible interpretation; consciousness and life become equally inexplicable, effort and toil futile, and all endurance vain. The conception of future existence may be attended with difficulties, perhaps insuperable, for our finite conscious minds: no intelligible idea can be formulated of a consciousness surviving the decay of the body. But

[1] "In Memoriam," l.

still more insuperable are the difficulties involved in the acceptance of annihilation of personality at death. The sudden break-down of the life so laboriously built up through toil and effort and pain; the waste and destruction, as of some clumsy power, well-meaning but blundering in the darkness, or of some malignant deity mocking the 'fruitless prayer' of his creations; 'the striving and striving and ending in nothing': these present a solution of the problem which the human mind must refuse to accept, so long as any other alternative is possible. Reason, religion, morality, are deprived of all their meaning; they become names surviving to frighten or allure men, after the entities they once represented have vanished; fables useful for the guidance of children, to be rejected as grotesque or absurd by grown men.

My own dim life should teach me this,
That life shall live for evermore,
Else earth is darkness at the core,
And dust and ashes all that is:

This round of green, this orb of flame,
Fantastic beauty; such as lurks
In some wild Poet, when he works
Without a conscience or an aim.

What then were God to such as I?
'Twere hardly worth my while to choose
Of things all mortal, or to use
A little patience ere I die;

'Twere best at once to sink to peace,
Like birds the charming serpent draws,
To drop head foremost in the jaws
Of vacant darkness and to cease.[1]

This was Tennyson's absolute conviction; not here a matter of faith, but of certainty. It may be true, he says, that there is no life after death; '*nil igitur mors*

[1] "In Memoriam," xxxiv.

est'; but this much is certain, that if that be indeed the final conclusion, life for me is not worth living. The trouble and toil are spent on empty abstractions, and 'all is vanity and a grasping of wind'; endurance of pain becomes a mere foolish suffering, if love itself, love strong as death, will become as though it had never been. Work for others is equally meaningless; where all can seek rest so easily and so speedily, what futility to suffer in order to save them 'an hour of torture' or a 'moment of pain' 'from that eternal silence.' "With death as my friend I tremble not at shadows." A bitter contempt arises for this troubled race of men; specks in the eternities and immensities of space and of time; surely it would be better that the sorry farce should cease, and the curtain ring down on a play which has lost attraction or interest. Yet sorrow and a great pity mingles with this scorn for toiling humanity, condemned to meaningless effort and struggle without purpose, striving for they know not what, seeking that which they will never attain, deluded with false hope and vain fancy, which yet have the power to die:—

> I often grow
> Tired of so much within our little life,
> Or of so little in our little life—
> Poor little life that toddles half an hour
> Crown'd with a flower or two, and there an end.[1]

For if the prophetic power is not so much the foretelling of the future as a keener insight into the things of the present, Tennyson in no small degree possessed this capacity; and in this case he saw clearly. The age in which he wrote was loudly proclaiming, not so much that belief in immortality was incredible, as that it was needless; a mere unnecessary adjunct, coming in unasked to trouble and disturb men's work in the real living

[1] "Lucretius."

world which they knew. And preachers of the new spirit were urging the replacement of this belief by sundry strange phantoms; natural morality, the religion of humanity, devotion to Truth, the worship of the 'holy spirit of man,' the sanction of effort in an immortality provided by reputation in future ages. All these Tennyson pierced through to their inner hollowness, and scornfully brushed aside. However much such ideas might animate passionate minds, and provide motives for self-sacrificing action; however much, for a time, men could fill themselves with the conviction that these provided adequate gods for worship: once they are thoroughly assured, he says, that life ceases with death, and that death is within the sudden reach of all, the only philosophy which can consistently be maintained is the philosophy which, exhibiting the craving for life as the worst enemy of the human race, advocates its resistance and its final extinction as the '*Summum Bonum*' of mankind.

For the mortality of the individual is the mortality of the race; and Humanity is only man writ large. Nor is there anything more worthy of the effort of man in the survival of a race which has not the courage to terminate its existence and so attain to rest. Given material plenty and warfare abandoned and disease overcome, what, after all, has mankind attained but leisure to permit the more constant fretting of the continual thought of the sadness of departing youth, and the sureness of approaching decay?—a thought which will only become more and more intolerable as life becomes richer and more worth the living. 'All we grow old and wither like the leaf'; no material progress, no development of the arts and luxuries of life, can ever soften the tragedy of such a change. 'A little fruit a little while is ours, and the worm finds it soon.' All

earthly goods only possess value as leading to something beyond; take the mystery of the Infinite from Art, from Nature, from human life, and at once they cease to yield satisfaction to mankind. Firmly establish belief in the mortality of the individual and the eventual destruction of the race, and youth relapses into a passionate pursuit of pleasure, and old age into hopeless regret after pleasure for ever gone. The impotence of effort, the futility of aspiration, the impossibility of ethical advance without an accompanying belief in immortality, provide for Tennyson sufficient justification for the maintenance of this truth, despite the absence of direct proof of its validity, and the crushing effects of evidence appearing to lead to an opposite conclusion.[1]

Against this statement, which Tennyson so firmly asserts, it has been maintained that many religions have previously existed in the world, teaching a high and stern morality, which yet have declined to consider, or definitely denied, the immortality of the individual conscious spirit. It is doubtful, however, if much weight can be attached to such an argument. It rests mainly on a wrong interpretation of the actual facts; there has never been any religious system of long-continued existence having at its fundamental basis the assertion of death as annihilation. Buddhism, often instanced as an example, appears a singularly ill-chosen one; for its essential tenet consists in the belief that the responsibilities and results of the acts performed by each individual are carried forward into a future life, and that each person will continue to suffer in successive cycles of existence, until he has purged himself from all earthly stain, and is worthy of the attainment of rest. And the

[1] For thought here summarised see especially "In Memoriam," "Lucretius," "Epilogue to Tiresias," "The Ancient Sage," "Vastness," and "God and the Universe."

religion of the Jews, despite its high ethical fervour, and its conviction that in this life the wicked suffer and the righteous receive their reward, exhibits throughout its long course a continually-growing consciousness of the unsatisfactory nature of this explanation. It exhibits the impossibility of permanent acquiescence in a view of human life by which the manifestation of Divine approval of righteousness is limited to the gift of a few brief years of comfort, and in which those who have chosen evil can always trick the Eternal Justice by the ready refuge of death.

But even if this has been true at any time in the past, it could scarcely be maintained that it is necessarily tenable at the present or in the future. For man is advancing towards a fuller consciousness, revealing a stronger development of varied experience, and a widening conception of personality. That which could satisfy him once will not satisfy him always. Earthly rewards and punishments might have provided sufficient sanction for a morality based on unquestioning obedience to incomprehensible laws; the setting of the wicked in slippery places, the bestowing upon the righteous of long life and plenteousness. But such an ideal can be received no longer. We have 'emerged from the heroic childhood of the race'; we can no longer yield unqualified obedience to externally-imposed demands. The highest ideal refuses to be content with the conception of a Deity edified by the transitory adoration of his creatures, and doling out material comfort for a brief space to those whom He approves, before finally consigning them to extinction; the lowest and crudest selfishness laughs at the terrors of a punishment which can at any time be eluded by self-inflicted death. Isolated individuals still assert, although with fainter voice and hope less confident, the possibility of a natural

system of ethics, and a satisfaction of the human spirit with the things of this world. But their followers are few, and their statements unconvincing; the systems they have elaborated seemed scarcely, at the present time, to possess sufficient vitality to be worthy of the scorn lavished upon them by Tennyson in his later poems.

If the world has a meaning it is possible to deduce the necessity for the survival of consciousness; but the alternative can always be advanced, May not the world, after all, be without any meaning whatever? To this doubt, from which he never quite escaped, Tennyson's answer appears the only one possible. 'Thou canst not prove the Nameless.'[1] We must acknowledge that this *may be* the truth; but the demands of the practical reason insist upon the other conclusion; and so long as the other possibility remains open we cannot accept for a basis of life, that which would destroy all life, and even the desire for life, reducing earth to 'darkness at the core,' and 'all that is' to 'dust and ashes.' Our only hope is to

> Cleave ever to the sunnier sight of doubt,
> And cling to faith beyond the forms of faith.

And just as in the 'small experience of every day' we are compelled to act on hypotheses from their very nature unprovable, to venture forward into the dark, to assume that memory of the past will afford us a safe guide for the future, and that the 'solid ground' will not 'fail beneath our feet'; so in the greater ventures of life we must perforce make our choice upon inconclusive evidence, and stake all upon the unknown. And as in the one case we find that our theories lead us aright, that things do not suddenly elude us, that, within

[1] "The Ancient Sage"; see the whole context. [2] *Ibid.*

limits, our forecast of the future has been correct; so in this 'short stormful passage between two eternities' we must be sustained by faith that in these greater matters our trust will be justified; that those who have clung to the nobler view of man's purpose and man's duty will ultimately be vindicated, and the meaner and lower views proved to have been wrong. "I believe in the immortality of the soul," says a modern philosopher, "not in the sense in which I accept the demonstrable truths of science, but as a supreme act of faith in the reasonableness of God's work."[1]

But if indeed all this be illusion and mind be but a 'transitory manifestation upon a background of nothingness,' and all the effort and struggle of man after ideals from their nature unattainable in the temporal world prove futile and vain, then it seems to matter but little who has been right and who has been wrong. For the one will never know that he has been following phantoms, and the other will never know that he apprehended the truth; in the universal ruin, amid the clash of dying worlds, the 'tiny spark of being' of the righteous, who sacrificed all things for the imperfect fulfilment of the ideal, and the indifferent, who refused to consider it, and the scornful, who definitely rejected it, will all together vanish into 'the sleep eternal, of an eternal night.'

The argument for Immortality based on the goodness of God, as stated in Butler's famous 'Analogy' carried little weight in Tennyson's mind. For him the difficulties of the belief in a Beneficent Deity are as manifest as the difficulties of the belief in a future existence; the one demands as great an effort of faith as the other; and unless the Ruler of the Universe is assumed to be good, to consist in His essence of that which we interpret as Love, the

[1] Fiske: "Destiny of Man," 113.

Natural evidence becomes weak and uncertain. The mere recognition of a spiritual principle behind the phenomenal world yields him no guarantee of the future survival of the human personality. Belief in a God who is in this sense Moral, who will identify happiness with goodness, who permits nothing to walk 'with aimless feet,' who is fashioning the Individual Soul for Himself, may indeed be considered to involve a belief in a future state to round off the ragged edges caused by Death. 'Why hast thou made all men for nought'? would remain an unanswerable reproach against a God who had set 'men to labour, and given them as guerdons death and great darkness after death.'[1] Satisfaction of the passionate craving for the presence of the departed, the bringing to fruition of powers here seemingly wasted and destroyed, the justification of those who have clung to the Highest ideal against the claims of self and sense: these are the necessary acts of an All-Just, All-Merciful God. But for Tennyson the postulate of such a Being is involved with as many difficulties, and the tokens of His existence are as hard to discern as the evidence for individual Immortality.

Yet although Tennyson was unable to find intellectual satisfaction in this line of argument, there was a certain class of evidence which more and more with advancing years he welcomed as likely to provide the desired certitude. In his earlier writings he had expressed his belief in the direct influence upon the minds of the living, of the spirits of the dead; and all through his life he remained convinced that some supernatural intercourse was possible. Towards the close of his life all the new scientific investigations into powers of the personality but little comprehended, and faculties of consciousness imperfectly developed, attracted him with a strange

[1] See "Life of Tennyson," vol. i. p. 312.

fascination. The revelation of apparitions of the living far from their bodily presence; the newly-discovered powers of telepathy, and the direct communications from one mind to another without the translation of thought into the symbolism of the senses; the evidence for appearances at or immediately after death; the influence of one Will over another in hypnotic phenomena: all these with their many allied manifestations appeared to him to point to a wider conception of mind, and to the possibility of obtaining knowledge by the strictest method of empirical investigation, of the life of the Spirit World. All his later poems are full of references to this newer research.

> Star to star vibrates light: may soul to soul
> Strike through a finer element of her own?[1]

And the inquiry develops later into a more positive assertion:—

> As the likeness of a dying man,
> Without his knowledge, from him flits to warn
> A far-off friendship that he comes no more.[2]

And in 'The Ring,' a poem full of speculation on the mysterious influence of the living and the dead:

> The Ghost in Man, the ghost that once was Man,
> But cannot wholly free itself from Man,
> Are calling to each other through a dawn
> Stranger than earth has ever seen; the veil
> Is rending, and the Voices of the day
> Are heard across the Voices of the dark.[3]

Tennyson seems indeed to have held that the hope for the immediate future lay in the pursuit of this new investigation. The present was the blackest hour before the dawn. Faith would no longer continue to have imposed upon it a burden greater than it could bear.

[1] "Aylmer's Field." [2] "Demeter and Persephone." [3] "The Ring."

The worst was over. The morning was already breaking. The new knowledge, continuing by the same methods as those already adopted, would itself rebuild that which it had done so much to destroy. It was for those still living in the darkness to 'strengthen the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees'; to maintain the larger hope against the despair of the good, and the indifference of the evil, until the night should quietly vanish before the coming day.

The assertion of a survival, of a persistence beyond the grave, was all that Tennyson required. Of the nature of this new life in the spiritual world, he was ready to acknowledge we can possess but little comprehension. Yet it was impossible altogether to refrain from inquiry; and here his speculations were modified in no small degree by his acceptance in its fullest significance, of the newly-apprehended principle of Evolution, and his interpretation of the Universe by this Cosmic Law, as a process towards an end. We must now consider the meaning of this conception, and its special application by Tennyson to the progress of the human spirit.

VII. EVOLUTION

THE theory most characteristic of the speculative thought of the nineteenth century is the theory of Evolution; and the substitution of a dynamical for a statical conception of the Universe has been the work of its greatest thinkers. The accomplishment of this change, not effected without much keen conflict, was mainly completed in the controversy which raged round the appearance of the 'Origin of Species,' and the attempted application of Evolutionary ideas in the realm of living organisms. But the principle had been recognised far earlier in the century: Hegel had endeavoured to apply it to history, in his Philosophy of the Spirit; Lyell and others had utilised it to explain Geological facts; Herbert Spencer had already commenced the laborious construction of the Synthetic philosophy, with its all-embracing Evolutionary system. Darwin's conclusions form part of a wider movement of thought, resulting not only in a changed interpretation of the facts of the world presented to human consciousness, but also in the adoption of a different attitude of Mind towards the Universe as a whole; in the 'replacement of the idea of a product by the idea of a process.' Tennyson had recognised the necessity for this re-statement of first principles even before the stir of the struggle with the older beliefs had forced the question before the minds of all men; and this work of re-statement in the philosophy of religion, and the conception of personality, and the ideal of a future existence, was the work on account of which he has been especially distinguished as a teacher of the newer generation.

To appreciate the magnitude of this work it is necessary

clearly to comprehend the meaning of this new principle of Evolution. At the birth-time of thought man looked out upon the Universe outside himself, and could only apprehend a perpetual flux, change apparently without law and without order. He was unable to descry any unity in this hurrying, transitory world surrounding him; and the only method by which he could provide any explanation for its phenomena was by hypotheses assuming that these were controlled by beings animated by spontaneous wills like his own. In his imagination behind all natural objects were personalities which could be appeased or offended. 'Caprice was the rule of existence,' conscious intelligence its guiding force; the gods demanded worship under threat of calamity, which would assuredly follow its omission; it was necessary to walk warily, not to refuse sacrifice, not to excite jealousy by the exhibition of too conspicuous happiness; yet even the most careful humility and liberal offering could not guarantee a satisfactory guidance of the course of events in the future.

Gradually, however, with the development of intelligence and the widening of knowledge this theory of the world-order gave place to another. A certain rhythmical result was discovered to recur; things did not act, in the present, according to a method altogether different from their behaviour in the past; it was found possible within narrow limits to predict the operations of the future. Certain definite and universal principles commenced to disentangle themselves from the phenomenal chaos; the assumption of independent volitions behind natural objects slowly died away. The principle of causality, also a product of the human mind, replaced it; and Causality, instead of Unconditioned Will, was projected outward into nature. So there arose the great conception of an orderly universe, ruled by fixed and unalterable laws. Liberated from the overwhelming fear of investiga-

tion, caused by terror lest impious attempts to penetrate their secrets would arouse the wrath of the gods, men rushed into the study of the Universe around them, filled with eagerness for knowledge of the laws behind phenomena, and the real firm materials of the world. Facts were collected in larger and larger store: wider and wider spheres of knowledge were embraced by this all-devouring activity of thought: confident search was pursued for the immutable elements, the interaction between which, controlled by unalterable laws, produced all the appearance of diversity and change exhibited in the sensible world.

In these far-reaching generalisations of natural science, men held that at length they had attained to the truth of the constitution of material things. They rejoiced in the order and the fixity, feeling themselves for the first time upon firm ground. The same law controlled the rush of the comet and the fall of the petals of the rose; the same substance, inanimate in the world of lifeless matter, caught up by the living protoplasm, manifested itself in the phenomena of life. Change became mere appearance and illusion; the changeless atoms, the unalterable energy, the great Eternal laws of being, were independent of the temporary experiences and transitory existence of humanity. Were all consciousness to cease, the natural world would still maintain its progress, the planets move on their ordered paths, the seasons return in their accustomed courses, the motion of the atoms persist, the elements and energy and unalterable laws of their being continue everlastingly the same.

This vast structure of empirical knowledge, slowly being erected by the labour of countless workers, was essentially dependent on a statical view of the Cosmos; both of the Macrocosmos without, the Universe known

to us through the senses, and the Microcosmos within, the consciousness of man. The world without presents itself to us as a world of ceaseless change, never repeating itself, no two facts being exactly the same. It was the function of scientific generalisation to exhibit the changelessness behind the change, the unalterable laws of nature. Underlying all things were the eternal matter and energy. The atoms of the different elements, each with their definite proportional weights, weaving by their interaction the properties of things, were themselves unchangeable. No effort of any conceivable power could add another unit of mass to the amount present in the Universe. The mysterious energy was also one, despite its diverse manifestations, measurable in definite quantity, which nothing could increase or diminish. And over all worked and guided the Eternal Laws, as they had worked from the foundations of the world, and as they would work far into the world to come.

And so also in the Microcosmos, the world of consciousness, the personal self was tacitly assumed to be ever the same as now. Knowledge, indeed, grows, but the principles of the personality remain unalterable, and the same tests of truth must remain for ever valid; the empirical investigation into the nature of consciousness may be considered to reveal truths applicable alike to the human mind before the birth-time of thought, and to men whatever may be their development in the infinite future.

And so the development of natural knowledge advanced under the general influence of this statical ideal, and the principles became frozen into stability. As the everlasting hills looked down upon the fleeting generations of man, so soon hurried away into nothingness, so the Eternal Laws of Nature remained immutably enduring,

while all other things passed away. The diverse species of plants and animals, the definite chemical elements, the unchanging atoms, the mechanical movements of matter controlling the movements of star and sun; these, at least, were sure and permanent. Consciousness inside us, unchangeable from generation to generation, natural law outside us, for ever eternal, were the fundamental principles from which men essayed to construct the Universe of Real being.

It is obvious that into this conception the idea of a Deity can be only introduced as the constructor of the self-sustaining Universe. This Universe was regarded as a great machine, wound up to go; marvellously adjusted, carefully balanced, contrived, and set working by a God who had ordained the laws of its action, and subsequently withdrawn Himself from His handiwork. The Laws of Nature were the laws controlling this machine; any interposition of the Deity to check or violate these principles became inconceivable. Men had but to accept, without a useless murmur, these externally-imposed principles, and regulate their lives accordingly. So also animals and plants were regarded as special creations of the Almighty Artificer, who for His pleasure had created them, that His works might show forth His glory. The atoms were the minted products of His energy, each existing unalterable, as first formed; these having been given, and the modicum of energy provided, and the laws controlling them, the Universe carried on its work without unnecessary interference from an Unknowable God, who, having made all things good, ceased henceforth to interfere with the work of His hands.

And the same conception controlled the interpretation of the dealings of God with men. Morality was regarded as something outwardly imposed, a system of law which men ought to follow. Obedience to this system was enforced

under penalty of everlasting punishment. The moral law appeared as a set of rules which changed not with the passing generations. Men appeared individually separate, through the creative power of God, created in His own image; they could choose between the good or evil presented before them; but the time for choice was brief, and the choice was endless; for after their short passage through this world, they passed into a fixed state for ever—Paradise, where they 'rest from their labours,' in the consciousness of perfect bliss, their trial over, their work finished, in the 'land where no more change shall be'; or Hell, to which they have been condemned, by an All-wise Inscrutable Deity for having chosen the evil and refused the good, where 'the smoke of their burning goeth up for ever and ever.'

Such were the religious ideas developed while the Statical ideal of the Universe prevailed in the minds of men; and it is easy to recognise that they were religious ideas which must inevitably decay. The ethical principle in men revolted against such moral conceptions of a Deity; the understanding could find no reason for the existence, and no satisfactory evidence of the being, of this absentee God, withdrawn from the works of His creation. So that such a theology rapidly fell into neglect; Nature herself became the object of worship; and men transferred to the Great Laws and Eternal principles those feelings of awe and adoration which they had once cherished, for a Personal God, behind the outward show of things.

Now the speculation of the latter portion of the nineteenth century has been largely engaged in the slow destruction of this goodly edifice. The all-devouring thought of man, ceaselessly pressing forward, must inevitably consume the products of its own creation. The

fact has been gradually apprehended that Causality, as much as Personality, is an illegitimate projection of our own experience into the world behind phenomena. The great system of natural laws, the permanent elements of the Universe, have been seen to be the products of our own consciousness thrown outside us, endowed with properties of our own making, and postulated as real behind the phenomenal world. "Lichtenberg," says a modern philosopher, "once contrasted the early ages of the world, when mankind was equally ready to believe in God and in ghosts, with the present age, which denies existence to both; he feared compensation in a future when all that would be believed in would be ghosts. Something like this seems to have happened."[1]

The new spirit, undermining this great structure, was compelled to interpret these laws in the light of the principle of Evolution. And this substituted the idea of reality as change for the idea of reality as rest. In this conception, the fixed world suddenly dissolved and disappeared; the old notion of perpetual flux revived. It was the replacement of the individual standpoint by the universal. By thus compressing time through a vaster outlook, and gazing at the world as if from afar, men came back to the conclusion of the old Grecian philosopher: 'All things give way; nothing remaineth.' The everlasting hills themselves, gazing indifferently upon so many hot and striving generations of men, suddenly lost their bold outlines, and dissolved in the perpetual flow of things. The boundary lines between species became blurred and indistinct. "The eye and the sun itself are literally in constant extinction and renewal, the sun only going out more gradually than the human eye, the system, meanwhile, of which it is the centre, in

[1] Lotze: "Metaphysik," vol. ii. sec. 213.

ceaseless movement no whither."[1] All things flow forward; nothing is stable, firm, abiding; all things move; all things are growing or dying; nowhere is anything at rest. The idea of Becoming has replaced the idea of Being. The laws themselves, once regarded as changeless, are found only to be relative conceptions, possessing no guarantee of permanence or finality. Far back in the past, other ideas of nature held sway; far in the future, others may be again triumphant.

"That which endures," says a great exponent of the new Faith, "is not one or another association of living forms, but the process of which the Cosmos is the product, and of which these are among the transitory expressions. . . . The state of Nature at any time is a temporary phase of a process of incessant change. . . . As no man fording a swift stream can dip his foot twice in the same water, so no man can, with exactness, affirm of anything in the sensible world that it *is*. As he utters the words, nay, as he thinks them, the predicates cease to be applicable; the present has become the past; the 'is' should be 'was.' The most obvious attribute of the Cosmos is its impermanence. It assumes the aspect, not so much of a permanent entity, as of a changeful process."[2] The same principle passes into the region of human consciousness. "The essence of thought itself is perpetual motion, from the dead past to a present itself deceased ere we can say, It is here."[3] The human Personality, as we know it, becomes a stage in an onward progress, with no guarantee of stability. Change is recognised as the fundamental necessity of conscious life, without which con-

[1] Pater: "Plato and Platonism," p. 9.

[2] Huxley: "Evolution and Ethics" ("Collected Essays," vol. ix. pp. 49, 50).

[3] Pater: "Plato and Platonism," p. 10.

sciousness vanishes. The human mind, growing from unlike beginnings, passes on to an indefinitely variable future. The ideas of men decay and change and fade away; those which have proved unalterably true to one age become manifestly false to another. The history of philosophy, morality, and religion, is a record of ideas which, from their very nature, are transitory.

So that, without and within, just when men began to feel themselves on firm foundations, the still world had suddenly taken upon itself motion. With a wider view, they felt the solid ground falling from beneath their feet. Nothing is firm; nothing is substantial; nothing is permanent; and the world around us, and the world within us, whether we acquiesce, or whether we resist, are being ceaselessly swept forward under this perpetual impulse of restless, inexorable change.

The first effect of the sudden dissolution of the elements which men had deemed most abiding was bewilderment and dismay. Now, as at its origin, the doctrine of the perpetual flux causes pessimism and sorrow. The 'weeping philosophy' was the source of much of the sadness of the old world; and, in its latest development, the consciousness of the perpetual onward flow of all things to an unknown goal results in philosophies of despair. Men seem as if clutching at something for ever eluding their grasp; no sooner have they seized it than it has swept forward into some other state of being. "All reality," says a modern philosopher, "is immersed in the flux of Becoming, which glides before our eyes in a Protean stream of change, interminable, indeterminate, indefinite, indescribable, impenetrable, a boundless and groundless abyss, into which we cast the frail network of our categories, fruitlessly, and in vain." [1] Life is only a long process

[1] "Riddles of the Sphinx," p. 79.

of dying, commencing at the moment of birth. Man, gazing at the region outside him, can only see 'an ever-breaking shore that tumbles in a godless deep'; and, desiring the secret of the Universe, can only discern 'a drift of all material things through an empty and godless sky.' The life of humanity becomes a mere 'ripple of the boundless deep'; and the nightmare vision of the old Roman poet is invested with a new significance :—

> A void was made in Nature; all her bonds
> Cracked; and I saw the flaring atom-streams
> And torrents of her myriad universe,
> Running along the illimitable inane,
> Fly on to clash together again and make
> Another and another frame of things
> For ever.[1]

'All hollow as the hopes and fears of men'; the cosmic process, the solid material earth, the 'little lives of men' but phantoms lost in the eternal spaces: the whole some day destined to vanish, leaving 'not a rack behind' in the Everlasting Quiet beyond the final change.

> That hour perhaps
> Is not so far when momentary man
> Shall seem no more a something to himself,
> But he, his hopes and hates, his homes and fanes,
> And even his bones long laid within the grave,
> The very side of the grave itself shall pass,
> Vanishing, atom and void, atom and void,
> Into the unseen for ever.[2]

But almost before the horror of this old dream had been fully realised, a new principle was enunciated, bringing comfort to the minds of men. And this was the principle of Evolution. It accepted the facts in

[1] "Lucretius." [2] *Ibid.*

the newer light, the reality of change, the continuous advance forward; only, it discerned an order underlying this progress. It conceived of change forming a process from a definite beginning to a definite end, and not a series of recurring cycles of restlessness throughout an empty sky. Change is not blind and aimless, but rational and orderly; not a drift, but an evolution. The laws may change, yet there is a higher law controlling the law of change itself. The universe as we know it is a Universe of Becoming; we can faintly discern a rational advance in the narrow sphere illuminated by our consciousness; we must have faith in the validity of the principle, in a Universal progress towards a rational end. The world is not simply an interaction of changing elements, a building up and a breaking down, a making and unmaking without purpose or plan. But the Universe is evolving ever higher and higher forms, developing continually towards the God who has created it that it might grow to Himself.

This is the view of change and Evolution, of which Tennyson was so strenuous an advocate. He accepted perhaps more completely than any other poet of the century, the principle of change in its fullest application. 'We sleep, and wake, and sleep, but all things move,'[1] he says. 'Then came a change as all things human change.' All the conclusions of modern science he thankfully welcomed. Evolution, the watchword of the new thought, was received by him as the fundamental principle of the Cosmos, behind which we cannot penetrate. But instead of confronting this with astonishment and despair, he accepted it as providing a much fuller and more satisfactory explanation of the world. For Evolution meant for him the recalling of God to His world, the

[1] "The Golden Year."

complete abandonment of the older doctrine of an absent Providence. Now, as of old, the spirit of God *moves* upon the face of the waters; and the power that is directing the forward progress of the Universe is essentially the same Power that started it on its changeful journey. The progress of things is not an aimless clash of elements, producing any chance products, that will be subsequently devoured in the same unmeaning chaos. But the change is orderly, with a purpose behind it, and a guiding hand directing it, producing harmony from apparent discord, developing it towards its predestined end.

And so Tennyson again and again asserts his faith in Evolution, as expressing a much less difficult explanation of the contradictions of the world than the older statical ideal. In the natural world identity accompanying change must be accepted. The only form of identity with change of which we have any conception, is change in personality: I am identical, yet I change. The fundamental principle of the world can thus only be apprehended as personality. Evolution brings back to Nature an immanent and a personal God. Without Him the progress of things remains inexplicable. With him it ceases to be a mere drifting forward: it becomes the working of a spiritual principle, realising itself through many diverse forms.

So also in the world of men, in that changing consciousness of which alone we possess the direct knowledge, religious systems rise and flourish and die, and nothing seems fixed and established, until men cry aloud for something firm and sure, behind the continual corrosion and decay. Yet by penetrating below the surface a certain process can be discerned, a spiritual principle developing towards self-consciousness. And this can be seen attempting to realise itself in many forms. These are not inharmonious, not out of tune; 'through the ages' one

'increasing purpose runs'; and the lower, more imperfect stage is a necessity for a higher which could not have existed without it. The 'old order' must indeed change, 'yielding place to new'; but such a change is directed by the guiding hand of a God who 'fulfils Himself in many ways, lest one good custom should corrupt the world.' Tennyson has expressed all this in one of his deepest utterances on Evolution, in the vision of the wife in 'Sea Dreams.' A luminous vapour lies round the North; from it issue long waves breaking on the line of cliffs; and as they break it is seen that these are no longer cliffs, 'but great Cathedral fronts of every age'; and one by one they totter and fall under the continual shock of the never-resting sea. And people cry in agony 'set them up,' or in triumph 'cast them down.' And even the figure of the Virgin and Child over all seems to totter. But all is in harmony: the luminous cloud, the breakers on the cliffs, the wailings of the crowd, all have blended and united in one musical sound; and, although the wave sweep away faiths and peoples together, nothing is ever out of tune. The passage will bear quoting in full: it is one of the great passages of Tennyson's poetry.

Round the North, a light,
A belt it seem'd, of luminous vapour, lay,
And ever in it a low musical note
Swell'd up and died; and as it swell'd, a ridge
Of breaker issued from the belt, and still
Grew with the growing note, and when the note
Had reached a thunderous fulness, on those cliffs
Broke, mixed with awful light (the same as that
Living within the belt) whereby she saw
That all those lines of cliffs were cliffs no more,
But huge Cathedral fronts of every age,
Grave, florid, stern, as far as eye could see,
One after one: and then the great ridge drew,
Lessening to the lessening music, back,

And pass'd into the belt and swell'd again
Slowly to music: ever when it broke
The statues, king or saint, or founder fell:
Then from the gaps and chasms of ruin left
Came men and women in dark clusters round,
Some crying "Set them up! they shall not fall!"
And others, "Let them lie for they have fall'n!"
And still they strove and wrangled: and she grieved
In her strange dream, she knew not why, to find
Their wildest wailings never out of tune
With that sweet note; and ever as their shrieks
Ran highest up the gamut, that great wave
Returning, while none marked it, on the crowd
Broke, mixt with awful light, and show'd their eyes
Glaring, and passionate looks, and swept away
The men of flesh and blood, and men of stone,
To the waste deeps together.[1]

Here is Tennyson's philosophy of Evolution—the ceaseless changes, the trouble and consternation caused by the passing away of those things once deemed firm and indissoluble, the recoil of the human spirit from the restless progress, the necessity for its continuance; yet the harmony underlying it all, and the 'note never out of tune.' The old Statical idea of the world has been swept away beyond recall. Change, as an ultimate factor in the world, is the principle upon which any religious or philosophical system must now be based. Tennyson's merit as a teacher was the frank recognition of this revolution, and the insistence on the purpose in the restlessness, and the harmony behind the change. Evolution is not simply a progress from homogeneity to heterogeneity, followed by dissolution and continual repetition; not simply a series of meaningless cyclic sweeps through an empty sky. It is a process with a purpose, a spiritual principle preserving identity in change realising itself through many varied forms; a continual

[1] "Sea Dreams."

advance upwards to a fuller self-consciousness and a richer life.

> I see in part
> That all, as in some piece of art
> Is toil co-operant to an end.[1]

The progress is a moral progress; the end, the attainment of the full realisation of the Spirit, the Restitution of all things in God.

[1] "In Memoriam," cxxviii.

VIII. EVOLUTION AND IMMORTALITY

THE frank acceptance of change as good, Tennyson maintains, instead of the condemnation of change as evil, is essential to an optimistic view of Evolution. To preserve this faith it is necessary to 'hold it good good things must pass';[1] to acknowledge that the state of rest, the 'continuing in one stay,' is not the *Summum Bonum*, the highest life of man. 'Meet is it' that change should control our being, lest we 'rust in ease.'[2] Change must be welcomed as leading on to a fuller, ampler existence; rest must be rejected as evil, that which once possessed life now 'slowly mouldering into lower forms.' To adhere to the lower ideal, when the higher is revealed; to attempt to escape from the intolerable burden of advance by dull clinging to the present; the craving for rest, the endeavour to avoid that continual pressing forward which is the law of our being; these are actions and desires which we must oppose. It is for us to overcome these tendencies, to acclaim the great world spinning 'for ever down the ringing grooves of change'[3] to acknowledge that as conscious personalities progress is for us the highest duty, the fulfilment in us of the Divine purpose.

Tennyson showed that he had accepted this point of view in his early poems, in which he contrasted the ideal of rest with the ideal of change. In the 'Lotos Eaters,' he depicts the former ideal; the gradually increasing languor, the yearning for freedom from the strain of continual activity, the forgetting and abandonment of

[1] "Will Waterproof's Monologue." [2] "Love thou thy land."
[3] "Locksley Hall."

that hard stern upward toil which alone can produce the higher development.

> Why are we weighed upon with heaviness,
> And utterly consumed with sharp distress,
> When all things else have rest from weariness?
> . . . . . .
> Hateful is the dark blue sky,
> Vaulted o'er the dark blue sea.
> Death is the end of life; ah why
> Should life all labour be?
> Let us alone. Time driveth onward fast,
> And in a little while our lips are dumb.
> Let us alone. What is it that will last?
> All things are taken from us, and become
> Portions and parcels of the dreadful Past.
> Let us alone. What pleasure can we have
> To war with evil? Is there any peace
> In ever climbing up the climbing wave?
> All things have rest, and ripen towards the grave;
> In silence: ripen, fall and cease;
> Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful ease.[1]

Under the influence of this ideal, God Himself, as choosing for Himself the highest good, is apprehended as at rest—the 'Quiet' above all things; and the Lotos Eaters picture their deities lying 'beside their nectar,' careless of the strife and turmoil of human life, enjoying the calm which they themselves are longing to obtain. All through this age, indeed, men turned wistfully from the perpetual motion of things around them, towards

> The gods who have attained
> Rest in a happy place, and quiet seats
> Above the thunder:[2]

and the mind can conceive of no better existence than the existence of

> Those who far aloof
> From envy, hate and pity and spite and scorn,
> Live the great life which all our greatest fain
> Would follow, centr'd in Eternal calm.[3]

[1] "The Lotos Eaters." [2] "Lucretius." [3] "Œnone."

'What pleasure can we have to war with evil?' 'There is confusion worse than death, trouble on trouble, pain on pain'; surely here we can recognise an echo of that philosophy of life which in the East has been crystallised into great religious systems, whose end has been the escape from the intolerable burden of living the life of change. And with the development of evolutionary theories, and the reassertion of the fleeting nature of all things, the same spirit has exhibited a revival in the western world. Confronted with the ceaseless motion of all things no whither, 'the self acknowledges the not self to be too strong for it'; it finds the harmful source of all the turmoil and restlessness, in that will-to-live which is continually forcing men along the path of change; it advocates resistance to this impulse, a refusal to be driven forward by it, a final destruction of desire. And how many older thinkers, hurried from change to change, and watching with anguish all things slipping away from them, and all that seemed good overwhelmed in fresh confusion which they could not interpret, have looked out sadly upon the transitory world, and prayed earnestly for rest. Plato, finding his highest good in the immutable ideas stored up in heaven, and seeing the temporary effect of the restless activity of Athens hurrying to destruction the body politic, finds in changefulness, in motion, the embodiment of everything evil. So Dante also, the greatest mind of the Middle Ages, compares the feverish activity of the people of Florence to the writhings of a sick man who

> Turns and turns again
> To ease him of his pain,

and is never satisfied. And, as long as man has established a worldly ideal of perfection, he must continue to gaze with sorrow upon that activity of the human

spirit which refuses to acquiesce in a mere temporal paradise. But a different ideal has been framed by others, who recognise that 'here we have no continuing city'; and with these the conception of change has superseded the conception of rest as the highest good. The human mind is not satisfied, nor can ever be satisfied. It is the restless activity of the Gothic spirit which Ruskin discerns in its architecture that is representative of all that is highest in the life of man. "It is this strange disquietude . . . that is its greatness; that restlessness of the dreaming mind that wanders hither and thither among the niches, and flickers feverishly around the pinnacles, and frets and fades in labyrinthine knots and shadows along wall and roof; and yet is not satisfied, nor shall be satisfied. The Greek could stay in his triglyph furrow, and be at peace; but the work of the Gothic art is fretwork still, and it can neither rest in, nor from its labour, but must pass on, sleeplessly, until its love of change shall be pacified for ever, in the change that must come alike on them that wake and them that sleep."[1]

So Tennyson, in the light of Evolution, would accept change as good; and would exalt a different ideal from that craving for rest manifested by the Lotos Eaters.

> How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
> To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
> As tho' to breathe were life. Life piled on life
> Were all too little . . . .
> . . . . But every hour is saved
> From that eternal silence, something more,
> A bringer of new things. . . .[2]

Here he fully accepts the principle of change as good;

[1] Ruskin: "Stones of Venice"—On the Nature of Gothic.
[2] "Ulysses."

and although later weakness prevailed, and he recoiled from the full consequences of his position, he never relinquished this faith as alone justifying the doctrine of Evolution. Even God Himself can be no longer conceived as resting; the older ideal of the 'Quiet' above all things, must be relinquished. It is the Spirit of God that moves still, moves in every form of real power everywhere—in Nature, and in man. Or, better, it must be asserted that God is neither rest nor change, but somehow transcending both, in a manner incomprehensible to our changeful personalities; '*Stabilis et incomprehensibilis*,' in the words of St Augustine, '*immutabilis mutans omnia nunquam novus nunquam vetus, semper agens semper quietus.*' But to us God may be conceived as resting, or as changing; and it is the latter view which now needs emphasis — God as activity, ceaseless, all-continued, all-embracing, the Giver of life, the Sustainer of all things, working towards His appointed end. The inclination to remain still, the revulsion against change, the clinging to the old, the resistance of the languid soul, must be fought and conquered. No system of Ethics can, in the future, be content with the conservation of the past, or with acquiescence in the conclusions of the present: unless progressing, it is dying or dead. No theology can again hold out as its ultimate ideal a state of changeless, everlasting rest.

To make this assertion, Tennyson was compelled to have faith in Evolution as the unfolding through Time of a definite, spiritual progress, and the continual advance of humanity towards a predestined end. He held that in the period of the past, illuminated by our limited knowledge, he could trace the evidence of this advance; he believed that by thus 'forgetting those things that are behind' and perpetually 'pressing to those things

that are before,' mankind could co-operate with God, in the fulfilment of the Divine plan. The symbolic sculptures round the Hall of Merlin summarise the past history of this development:—

> In the lowest beasts are slaying men,
> And in the second men are slaying beasts,
> And on the third are warriors, perfect men,
> And on the fourth are men with growing wings.[1]

And more and more did he come to regard Sin as representing in this evolution the survival of the older stages, which ought to have vanished before the advance of the newer. These had their work, their place in the design of Him who made 'the darkness and the light'; but it was the clinging to these, despite the progressive advance of spirit, the refusal to accept the necessary changes, which produced in man an alienation from God and a thwarting of the Divine purpose. The elimination of the 'ape and tiger,' the 'working out of the beast,' was the labour of this long process—a labour as yet only partially completed, for man is still 'being made.' "Our bodies are those of animals, our feelings those of savages, our reason that of men, while our destiny and duties seem those of angels."[2] "The lusts of the flesh, the incubus of ancestral sins, are ever at war with the aspiration of the spirit";[3] and the painful upward toil is the fruitful cause of the groaning and travailing in pain of the whole creation. It is the duty of man to abandon that which is outworn, to throw off the husks that he has outgrown, to continually struggle forward towards the light, to that unity which sin as the estranger destroys, and to that 'Life which is life indeed,' only ultimately attainable after 'many changes.'[4]

[1] "The Holy Grail." [2] "Riddles of the Sphinx," p. 107.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 104. [4] See "The Progress of Spring."

Influenced by this wide and far-reaching principle, Tennyson approaches the consideration of Immortality, and the future condition of the Soul. It is very evident that his treatment of this question will be different from that essayed by former speculators who regarded change as evil. To him the human earthly existence is merely a stage in the onward progress of the spirit; we come 'out of the deep,' we pass 'into the deep' again. In this future life there will be no rest, no standstill; the progress is not summarily arrested by death. The spirit passes into larger, ampler life—a life but dimly conceivable to those left behind, but a life of upward endeavour, accompanied by the revelation of larger powers, and the outputting of wider energies, and the attainment of a deeper love. Death's 'truer name is onward'; utilised by God for His purpose; it cannot check or thwart that purpose; and the sudden, and, to us, inexplicable destruction exhibits in reality

> No discordance in the roll
> And march of that Eternal Harmony
> Whereto the worlds beat time.[1]

So that in all Tennyson's varied speculations on the future life of his friend, he contemplates him, not resting in a Paradise of peaceful bliss, but filled with

> A life that bears immortal fruit,
> In those great offices that suit
> The full-grown energies of heaven,

still striving, still advancing, still pressing continually forward, nearer and nearer to God. So also in his farewell to the great soldier who had saved his country, he no longer considers him as entering into rest; but

> We doubt not that for one so true
> There must be other nobler work to do

[1] "Death of the Duke of Clarence."

Than when he fought at Waterloo,
And Victor he must ever be.[1]

Evolution must be applied universally :—

Eternal process moving on,
From state to state the spirit walks.[2]

Death must be regarded as no real break in the forward progress; but a step, great indeed as a severance from those behind, but yet carrying forward the personality as developed here, through continual striving after the best, into the Eternal world.

The Voices of the day
Are heard across the Voices of the dark.
No sudden heaven, nor sudden hell, for man,
But through the Will of One who knows and rules—
And utter knowledge is but utter love—
Æonian evolution, swift or slow,
Through all the Spheres—an ever-opening height,
An ever-lessening earth.[3]

We have only to contrast this position with that maintained by some of the representatives of the older ideal, to appreciate the immense difference which the acceptance of the principle of Evolution has made in human conceptions of the future. In the earlier time, such a vision of the other world would have been regarded with horror. The almost universal object of desire was that 'rest that remaineth for the people of God.' The incompatibility of this 'little life that toddles half-an-hour' with the tremendous powers and aspirations of men had never been completely realised. So to these older poets, bewildered in a world which denied them stability, rest seemed the one desirable state for troubled

[1] "Death of the Duke of Wellington."
[2] "In Memoriam," lxxxv. [3] "The Ring."

humanity. To Spenser, change as good is inconceivable. 'Mutabilitie,' the subject of the last uncompleted canto of the 'Faerie Queen,' he regarded with fear and condemnation. He is driven to the sad conclusion that she reigns on earth. The thought fills him with melancholy. His only hope is to look forward to a future 'changelessness beyond the change.' 'The time shall come when all shall changed be,' he says; 'and from henceforth none no more change shall see.' And in the last two stanzas of the last broken canto of his great poem, he sums up the conclusion of the older philosophy concerning the life of change.

When I bethinke me on that speech, why-leare
Of Mutabilitie, and well it way,
Me seemes, that though she all unworthy were
Of the Heav'n's Rule: yet, very sooth to say,
In all things else she bears the greatest sway:
Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle,
And love of things so vaine to cast away;
Whose flowing pride, so fading and so fickle,
Short time shall soon cut down with his consuming sickle.

Then gin I thinke on that which Nature sayd,
Of that same time when no more Change shall be
But steadfast rest of all things, firmly stayd
Upon the pillons of Eternity,
That is contrayr to Mutabilitie.
For all that moveth doth in change delight:
But henceforth all shall rest eternally
With him that is the God of Sabaoth hight:
O! that great Sabaoth God, grant me that Sabaoth's sight.[1]

How great a divergence from the ideal of the later poet! From the yearning for that 'land where no more change shall be,' to the passionate aspiration, 'forever alive, forever forward.' Though Tennyson sometimes, in weakness desired only rest, and, unable to see light through

[1] "Faerie Queen"—"On Mutabilitie."

the darkness, cried backward instead of forward, yet this remained to the end the vital principle of his life and his religious teaching; the only principle by which the theories of Evolution were saved from producing despair. And so from his death-bed he can but reiterate the same message, craving for progress, 'on and always on.'

When the dumb Hour, clothed in black,
Brings the Dreams about my bed,
Call me not so often back,
Silent Voices of the dead,
Toward the lowland ways behind me,
And the sunlight that is gone!
Call me rather, silent voices,
Forward to the starry track
Glimmering up the heights beyond me,
On and always on![1]

This ready acceptance by Tennyson of the theory of the Evolution of Spirit produced in his views as to the nature of personality and the future conditions of existence a distinct modification with advancing years. He commenced with the Particular, the individual self, completely isolated, possessing firm conviction of its own reality. This individual he regarded as eternally persisting; any merging of the personal consciousness into a higher life is to him inconceivable; under the influence of his personal love for Arthur Hallam, and the desire for the reuniting of the severed parts of the 'friendship that had mastered time,' he refused to be satisfied with any semi-pantheistic idea of the absorption of the personal consciousness in the 'general Soul.'

That each, who seems a separate whole,
Should move his rounds, and fusing all
The skirts of self again, should fall,
Remerging in the general Soul,

[1] "The Silent Voices."

> Is faith as vague as all unsweet:
> Eternal form shall still divide
> The eternal soul from all beside:
> And I shall know him when we meet.[1]

But gradually with his firmer grasp of the idea of Evolution Tennyson's belief broadened and deepened. Spirit to him was the ultimate reality of the world: and the spiritual principle is developing through change, towards an end. The forms of things as we know them, the shifting phenomena of that which we term the material world, represent the different stages in the upward development. Each new law can be recognised as a higher imposed upon a lower; each step must be judged by the end rather than by the beginning. Every temporary manifestation becomes inadequate, as the spirit advances towards self-consciousness and freedom. The higher law absorbs the lower and in absorbing supersedes it. This spirit cannot consist in its ultimate form of all the innumerable personalities of the past the present and the future for ever separated and apart; there must be a progress, and a progress towards a unity. The world process must be conceived as the realisation of an anterior idea or purpose in the Divine consciousness. The One from which it starts has become differentiated, in order that it may ultimately attain to a unity which is conscious of itself; a oneness which has developed from diversity, by conscious choice of a unity, exhibiting a higher order of connection than the former undivided simplicity. This world, as we apprehend it, is only a stage in the upward progress; and the process, which we can discern as working in this limited arena in the upward evolution of humanity, is being continued in other spheres with each individual soul. Men possess common knowledge and similar faculties; they appear to construct within themselves the

[1] "In Memoriam," xlvii.

same picture, which they term the external world. Modern research is demonstrating that minds are not so completely cut off from each other as was once assumed, that soul can directly influence soul through powers of personality at present only in rudimentary stages of development. The reality of Love, the hunger and yearning for union with those whom we love in a fuller and more complete sense than any union to which we can at present attain, the passionate desire to subordinate personal good to the good of the beloved, seem to indicate the existence of a real working towards unity, a real link uniting separate personalities. Ultimately, it is conceivable that, through the further development of this principle to include all men, and through the purification of the individuals until they have all accepted the same end, and merged their egoistic desires in the good of the whole, humanity may become One, forming a unity in a much more literal interpretation of the term than is possible in our present limited sphere.

For here the trammels of the flesh separate us, the one from the other: 'in the sea of life enisled . . . we mortal millions live *alone*.' Yet at times, when 'the moon their hollows lights,' with 'a longing like despair' these islands feel that they are surely 'parts of a single continent'; their prayer must ever be for the restoration of this unity, by the destruction of the 'unplumbed, salt, estranging sea.'[1] The limitations of Space and Time keep us apart; but in the Eternal World space and time are no more. Yet these are not the only dividing and isolating factors. Sin is the great separating principle, driving men apart in the pursuit of their own separate, personal, selfish ends; Unity is only attainable by the development of the opposing principle of Love. 'That we all may be *one*,' must be the highest universal aspiration. The whole

[1] See Matthew Arnold: "To Marguerite."

course of Evolution in its vast onward sweep, must be regarded as the development, on the one hand, of conscious spiritual personality in its fullest manifestation in the perfect individual life; and, on the other hand, of progress towards a richer unity by the conscious subordination in these personalities of their own ends to the Universal good, by the continued increase of that love which is eternal, the real bond of union beyond space and time, in the land where 'love will conquer at the last.'[1] This indeed is not conceivable directly at death. It must be the termination of a lengthy process, the goal towards which the human race is advancing. Love draws us together here, more perhaps in the world beyond the grave; absolute love might produce absolute unity. The struggle towards this unity must be the work of the highest religion.

So we find in Tennyson's later poems the ideal of *Man* developing as distinct from the ideal of *men*. The toil of men throughout all history exhibits an upward progress; 'millions of ages' had already gone to the 'making of Man.'[2] The individual labours, the species benefits. Only the latest comers, says Kant, can have the good fortune of inhabiting the dwelling which the long series of their predecessors have toiled, though without any conscious intent, to build up.[3] Gradually we may get to treat the whole life of the race as if it were the continuous development of an immortal being realising the idea only in the species, not in the individual.[4]

> If twenty million of summers are stored in the sunlight still,
> We are far from the noon of man, there is time for the race to grow.[5]

[1] "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After."
[2] "Making of Man."
[3] See Kant: "Idea for a Universal History."
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] "The Dawn."

Through the development towards perfection of each individual life, 'Man is being made.'

> Man as yet is being made, and ere the crowning Age of ages,
> Shall not æon after æon pass and touch him into shape?
>
> All about him shadow still, but, while the races flower and fade,
> Prophet-eyes may catch a glory slowly gaining on the shade,
> Till the peoples all are one, and all their voices blend in choric
> Hallelujah to the Maker 'It is finish'd. Man is made.'[1]

This is the key to the process of evolution; the 'working out of the beast,' the perpetual advance to a higher stage of being. That which was good for a former age cannot be good for the next. The individual as well as the race advances, 'forgetting those things that are behind,' ever pressing forward. Men must have faith, despite the backward eddies of the current, that this process will continue, until the end is attained. In his old age Tennyson gazes out on the world around him and sees much that at first sight seems to exhibit progress as evil, producing nothing but social disorder and the perishing of the good. The Voice of the Earth goes 'wailingly past him,' and says:—

> I would that my race were run,
> For teeming with liars, and madmen, and knaves,
> And wearied of Autocrats, Anarchs, and slaves,
> And darken'd with doubts of a Faith that saves,
> And crimson with battles, and hollow with graves,
> To the wail of my winds, and the moan of my waves
> I whirl and I follow the sun.[2]

The change is sure; the progress sweeps forward 'into the younger day.' Faith must maintain that the progress is guided, that the effort is not vain; with the 'Making of Man' all will be seen to have been good, in the final triumph, 'When God has made the pile complete.'

[1] "The Making of Man." [2] "The Dreamer."

Mourning your losses, O Earth,
Heart-weary and overdone!
But all's well that ends well,
Whirl, and follow the sun!

He is racing from heaven to heaven
And less will be lost than won,
For all's well that ends well,
Whirl, and follow the sun!
. . . . . .
For moans will have grown sphere-music
Or ever your race be run!
And all's well that end's well,
Whirl and follow the sun![1]

This cannot indeed be interpreted as the sacrifice of the individual for the benefit of future generations, the expenditure of the efforts of countless numbers in order that their remote descendants may find life a little more comfortable or a little less burdensome before their final extinction. Men can never be satisfied with mere earthly perfection. Granted all the changes advocated, the old difficulty would still return. "I felt that the flaw in my life must be a flaw in life itself; that the question was, whether, if the reformers of society and government could succeed in their objects, and every person in the community were free and in a state of physical comfort, the pleasures of life, being no longer kept up by struggle and privation, would cease to be pleasures."[2] Any statement of the possibility of future happiness in this earth is found to be unsatisfying. 'Robed in universal harvest,' 'the kindly earth may slumber lapt in universal law'; 'Universal Peace' may 'lie like a shaft of light across the land through all the circle of the golden year';[3] and men may dwell in safety, 'gathering all the fruits of earth, and crown'd with all her flowers.'[4] Yet even in this

[1] "The Dreamer." [2] Mill: "Autobiography," p. 145.
[3] "The Golden Year."
[4] "Ode at Opening of the Exhibition," 1851.

state men would be compelled once more to acknowledge themselves as pilgrims and strangers on the earth as their fathers were. The 'one ripple of the boundless deep feels that the deep is boundless, and itself for ever changing form, but ever more one with the boundless motion of the deep.'[1] And, however pleasant the port and friendly the company, ever beneath the outward rejoicing can be heard that clear call from the sea which will finally overpower all other voices, and compel the mariner to put forth again towards the soul's true home 'beyond the sunset.' This world to the human Spirit is a place of effort, not of happiness; and the effort will be as great or greater when all the conceivable objects which at present we set before us have been gained. El Dorado is never attainable in this world; but the pattern of the heavenly city is 'laid up in heaven'; and there it is being built by the constant effort of the workers here. The Man that, with Tennyson, is being made is not a vague metaphorical abstraction, as expressed by some enthusiastic writers, setting forth the development to fuller earthly life of the individual selves who shall succeed us. Such an ideal cannot satisfy the aspirations of man. Death must remain, cutting off the individual just as he appears fitted for infinite possibilities; death of the race is only a more prolonged agony than the death of the individual. And even without death, supposing that life could be indefinitely lengthened through the increase of natural knowledge, yet the condition of the human spirit 'pent up' within its earthly limitations would be ever more wretched; and the experience of mankind would be the experience of Tithonus of old:—

> I asked thee, 'Give me immortality.'
> Then didst thou grant mine asking with a smile,
> Like wealthy men who care not how they give.

[1] "The Ancient Sage."

But thy strong Hours indignant work'd their wills,
And beat me down and marr'd and wasted me,
And tho' they could not end me, left me maim'd
To dwell in presence of immortal youth,
Immortal age beside immortal youth,
And all I was in ashes.
. . . . . .
Let me go: take back thy gift;
Why should a man desire in any way
To vary from the kindly race of men,
. . . . . .
Of happy men that have the power to die.[1]

"Our breast is parched and fretted and at last crushed,' says Jean Paul, "by the slow fever-fire of an infinite love for an infinite object, and must be assuaged by nothing better than the hope that this heart-sickness, like a physical heat, will sometime be removed by laying on it the ice-slab of death."

Tennyson's conception of the Man that was being made was something very different. It was the ultimate perfection of the Self-conscious Spirit through individual effort continued in this world and the world beyond the grave; the coming into one, the bringing all things back to unity, through the harmony of the will and the perfection of Love.

And this was no pantheistic ideal, comparable to the ideal which he rejected in the earlier stages of his thought. The breaking of the bubble of life, the knowledge that though we perish as individuals the energy which has sustained us will become part of the great energy of Nature, cannot afford satisfaction to the consciousness of man. For this would be a process of degradation, the higher life passing back into the lower, not a progress upward. Consciousness, the highest development of spirit known to us, cannot finally degenerate into something less than consciousness. The

[1] "Tithonus."

unity attainable will not be the unity of formless chaotic energy. It will be the conscious merging of self in the higher Consciousness, in which the individual is not destroyed but only come to its ultimate fruition.

It is "the infinite Subject in eternal movement, the process by which it died that it might live, as it were, sacrificing its infinitude to finitude, dissolving its abstract and universal in order to concrete and particular being, yet ever only that it might return out of the finite and the particular into the infinite and universal again, though as articulated and reconciled consciousness."[1] "The process by which the Absolute is evolved into the relative and the relative returns, reconciled, into the bosom of the Absolute, represents at once the life of God and the history of the Universe."[2]

This is the object towards which is working the Spirit behind the drama of the Evolution of the Cosmic process; the fulfilment of the ideal shall be accomplished 'in the serene result of all' when 'God shall be all and in all.' Then only at length shall each individual be able to participate in his own work, to 'see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.' Nothing will be lost, nothing will be destroyed; all will be gathered up into One; all discord will vanish; the toil and pain of the countless generations now forgotten will attain to its fruition. The age-long effort, the continued suffering, the hunger and search after truth and beauty and righteousness, will find their full satisfaction. The claims of the individual will be reconciled with the claims of the universal: Man will be made.[3]

[1] Fairbairn: "Christ in Modern Theology," p. 217 (Hegel and Modern Theology).

[2] *Ibid.* p. 219.

[3] See "In Memoriam," "The Making of Man," "By an Evolutionist," "The Dawn," etc.

Such is the faith of Tennyson in the goal of all things, which he accepted towards the close of his life. It had been received by him on trust, as perhaps the least difficult to believe of the many contradictory hypotheses. The method of its working he never clearly apprehended. How humanity was to be gathered into one, how the self could find its highest good in the apparent sacrifice of self, how all things could be brought into unity, he never understood; and the absence from his vision of any method, and the faintness of the tokens of its operation, and the existence of much that appeared to be working directly contrary to his ideal, caused him often to relapse into sad contempt or despair.

Yet confident belief in this progress had been manifested many centuries ago, and the philosophy of Evolution only came to provide confirmation to opinion at first accepted on faith alone. The purpose had been announced, and the principles of that purpose asserted; that the way to the highest life lay in the renunciation of self; that sin was the cause of estrangement, and love the principle of union; that ultimately all discord and division would cease, and all things again be gathered into one. The purpose had been announced, and the ideal life lived, and the machinery for the tranquil attainment of this world end had been working throughout eighteen disordered centuries. Tennyson never clearly apprehended the doctrine of the divine Economy by which 'through the Christ' the restitution to unity of all things will be effected; a revelation necessary to complete the acceptance of the spiritual interpretation of the evolutionary process, as exhibiting the working towards this goal of the effort of men, helped and guided by the effort of God.

IX. PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

TENNYSON regarded as the goal of all his speculations the claims of the practical reason; and the final test of all constructive theories of philosophy was for him their influence upon the course of right conduct. Morality was the fundamental keystone of all his system; not what men think, but what men do, he held to be the really important question: 'the end of man is an action not a thought, though it were the noblest.' Anything which tends to draw away human energies from the common duties and immediate demands for the alleviation of human suffering he condemned as harmful and pernicious. The ordinary world, the everyday life of men, the way in which they conduct themselves, their relations more especially with other persons around them, are, in his view, the things of fundamental importance. His whole progress of constructive thought, all his inquiry after the knowledge of God or the Immortality of the human spirit, was stimulated by the fact that without these two beliefs he was unable to formulate any system of practical ethics. 'How shall I act?' 'Why shall I act?' are the questions for which he demands definite replies. 'What is the highest good for me to strive after?' 'Why should I sacrifice immediate pleasure for problematical benefit in the future?' 'Why should I perform any unselfish action?'—all the difficult problems connected with the ethical 'ought,' which have been the subject of discussion of moralists for so many ages, are the questions to answer which all Tennyson's speculations were endeavours, the questions which for him represented the ultimate problems alike of philosophy and religion.

And in the realm of practical ethics Tennyson maintained a working creed, which, although based on his theology, and in its turn reacting upon it, was in a sense independent, resting on its own fundamental principles. Of these principles the first and most important was the assertion of the freedom of the Will. Will, for Tennyson, is the ultimate power of the Universe; if the postulate of its freedom be abandoned, he is unable to formulate any satisfactory system of morality. With Kant, he can see nothing finally good in the world except a good will; with Lotze, he is compelled to recognise unconditioned Will as a reality behind which no investigation can penetrate. This Will is realised in choice; and the moral element in any action is dependent upon the free choice of the individual, the acceptance by his whole being of the higher principle, and the rejection of the lower. A man's volition is uncontrolled by the state of things around him; in a sense it is independent of his environment, independent even of his past choice. So long as a man remains a moral being he can always choose between the lower and the higher course; if he cannot, his action ceases to be a subject of moral approval or condemnation. But the alternatives as presented to consciousness are modified by his past actions; if a man continues to choose the lower, the lower becomes the easier and simpler choice, the definite acceptance of the higher becomes the harder; ultimately, he may be unable to realise in his action this higher ideal, through its lack of attractive power in his mind; just as in the 'Vision of Sin' after a long course of selfish indulgence, the man was unable even to apprehend any beauty or attraction in unselfishness and purity and truth. Moral effort, the acceptance by the person of a motive which he arduously attempts to realise, is one of the real forces of the world. The putting forth of this effort makes

the choice moral; the stronger the inclination towards sin, the greater the effort required to realise the weaker but higher motive; the more completely and more emphatically the higher is chosen, the easier such a choice is made in the future. In the end it is possible to conceive of a state in which the lower motive will be present in consciousness, but inoperative as a power urging to action, the Will being fixed in its acceptance of the higher; and then we shall at length have attained true freedom, having the power of completely realising our highest nature, that is, our real selves. But in this world such a state appears impossible; for here the scale of Duty stretches ever before us, and the path 'winds upward all the way'; and although we may be ever climbing the mountain-side, yet the summit stretches far beyond us toward those 'shining table-lands to which our God Himself is moon and sun.'[1]

Tennyson asserts morality as dependent on choice, the choice of the Will between conflicting motives. Yet one of his deepest convictions was the universality of law and order in the spiritual no less than in the material world. Our wills are free and independent; but they are free in order that we may make them conformable to law, that moral law which is the true law of our true being. With Tennyson, disorder is an unpardonable sin, liberty becoming licence, the subject of his severest strictures. Choosing to act according to law is a necessity of moral progress; 'Our wills are ours, we know not how'; but—

> Our wills are ours, to make them thine.[2]

Knowledge of self, reverence for self, control of self, form the three necessities of moral action:[3] none of these

[1] "Death of the Duke of Wellington."
[2] "In Memoriam," Prologue. [3] "Œnone."

can be complete in the world with its present limitations. The will possesses a limited range; finite consciousness cannot contemplate the unveiled truth; a little circle is illuminated, outside is darkness. But within that circle the choice is made; and, however contracted the horizon, that choice is a real one—a decision in one sense irrevocable, a real change in the eternal world beyond the limitations of the phenomenal.

> To live by law
> Acting the law we live by without fear,[1]

is the duty of the individual; and the highest task of the patriot and statesman is to control the aimless impulse and reduce the chaos to order:—

> To make
> The ever-changing world of circumstance
> In changing chime with never-changing Law.[2]

With Tennyson sin is disorder, violation of the law; not simply the law imposed from without, but the law within us; so that, in sinning, we are sinning as much against ourselves as against God; or, better, against the light that lighteth every man, the God that is in ourselves. Only the will is in itself partially conditioned by previous choice; and so we ourselves mould our own characters. So long as we are responsible and moral beings we are compelled to acknowledge a choice, an alternative between two possible courses, a selection of ends put before us, the adoption of one of them being absolutely Right and the other absolutely Wrong. But every choice of the lower will make the higher harder to attain. By neglecting or violating the moral ideal we can corrupt our divine power of will; we can injure it by weakness or irresolution, or by the refusal to put forth effort where effort is

[1] "Œnone." [2] "To the Duke of Argyll."

demanded. Ultimately, we can conceive of a condition where right choice is impossible. In this sense the Will is not unconditioned; for by deliberate choice of the bad, as an end, the desire 'evil be thou my good,' the power of choosing the good may be destroyed;

> Like one
> That all in later, sadder age begins
> To war against ill uses of a life.
> But these from all his life arise, and cry,
> 'Thou hast made us Lords, and canst not put us down.'[1]

All high morality depends, then, on the development of the unfettered will, the power of such a Will becoming stronger with each choice of the good, but at the same time less liable to deviate from this choice; so that, ultimately the will is perfectly free and yet perfectly determined in the assertion of the highest ideal. Then, indeed, the consummation is attained when the 'limited individual Will is made one with the Will of the Universe'; and

> The full-grown will
> Circled through all experience, pure law,
> Commeasure perfect freedom.

But for the weak will, corrupted by indolence or by excess, what prospect is there but of ultimate servitude to the lowest passions of man, slavery to something outside itself and final negation of that freedom, the attainment of which is the object of its existence?

> But ill for him who, bettering not with time,
> Corrupts the strength of heaven-descended Will,
> And ever weaker grows thro' acted crime,
> Or seeming-genial venial fault,
> Recurring and suggesting still!
> He seems as one whose footsteps halt,

[1] "Gareth and Lynette."

> Toiling in immeasurable sand,
> And o'er a weary sultry land,
> Far beneath a blazing vault,
> Sown in a wrinkle of the monstrous hill,
> The city sparkles like a grain of salt.[1]

All the characters Tennyson pourtrays are depicted in the act of choice between two alternatives. In this choice and its results lies the whole interest and tragedy of their history; and according as they identify themselves with the one or the other, so we are to judge their actions good or evil. Lancelot, entangled by his guilty passion for the Queen, is unable to break it unless she wills it. 'Would I break it if she did?' he asks. He cannot answer; only he can assert that, if not, if he would not choose the good when the choice for once was simple and clear before him, the best that he can hope for is death and utter annihilation; because the adherence to evil when definitely recognised as evil means the final destruction of the power of freedom, which is his divine right as a man.

> If I would not, then may God,
> I pray Him, send a sudden Angel down
> To seize me by the hair and bear me far,
> And fling me deep in that forgotten mere,
> Among the tumbled fragments of the hills.[2]

What, then, is to decide this infinitely important choice? How am I to know which is the right course of action and which the wrong? Our human life here is such a complicated tangle, the motives are so mingled and intricately woven together, that often the good must appear as the evil and the evil as the good. Action in this uncertain world seems in most cases to resemble that in the vision of Queen Guinevere, in which 'a great God's Angel' offered her red and blue cloths to choose

[1] "Will." [2] "Lancelot and Elaine."

between, asserting that one was Heaven and one was Hell, the choice being for ever, with nothing to guide her in her irrevocable decision.[1] And many cases of necessary action resemble this offer; a good and evil presented to us which we are unable to discriminate, and a choice to be made between them, 'brief and yet endless.'

For guidance in these hourly decisions Tennyson accepts the moral law, as at present recognised, as immediately, if not ultimately valid; but at the same time he is willing to acknowledge that this must be judged by some more fundamental principle. And this principle, the final test of the morality of any action is with Tennyson, Love. Sin against Love is for him the unpardonable sin; and the rejection of love the one hopeless condition of the human soul. A soul that cannot love cannot perform a moral act. Love is the reality of the Universe, the link that unites persons together, the bond which will finally draw into one the diverse consciousness of men. God is Love: it is as 'immortal Love,' that Tennyson addresses Him; and his aspiration at the close of his life is for fuller knowledge of

> That Love which is and was
> My father, and my brother, and my God.[2]

He that has chosen love has chosen all things; he that has rejected love has rejected the whole purpose of his being, and made an utter ruin of his life.

> And he that shuts Love out, in turn shall be
> Shut out from Love, and on her threshold lie
> Howling in outer darkness.[3]

This lesson Tennyson insists upon in almost every one of

[1] *Cf.* W. Morris, "Defence of Guinevere."
"Doubt and Prayer." [3] Introduction to "Palace of Art."

his earlier poems. In the 'Palace of Art' the soul fell into dread and deep loathing of herself, because she had surrounded herself with beauty, and neglected human love. In 'The Princess' the whole airy fabric falls to the ground, because in the pursuit of knowledge Ida and her companions had left no place for love. The hero in 'Maud' in attaining love, has attained to the true secret of existence; with this success, what mattered earthly failure?

> O let the solid ground
> Not fail beneath my feet
> Before my life has found
> What some have found so sweet;
>
> Then let come what come may,
> What matter if I go mad,
> I shall have had my day.[1]

And, on the other hand, the tragedy of the dying painter lies just in this fact, that, in order to realise some false ideal concerning Art, he had sacrificed the one thing for the attainment of which he was sent into the world.

> Ay, but when the shout
> Of His descending peals from Heaven, and throbs
> Thro' earth, and all her graves, if *He* should ask
> 'Why left you wife and children? for my sake,
> According to my word?' And I replied
> 'Nay, Lord, for *Art*,' why, that would sound so mean
> That all the dead, who wait the doom of Hell
> For bolder sins than mine, . . .
> Would turn, and glare at me, and point and jeer,
> And gibber at the worm, who, living, made
> The wife of wives a widow-bride, and lost
> Salvation for a sketch.[2]

In the Eternal world, Tennyson consistently maintains, it is love which unites men together; in love we approach

[1] "Maud." [2] "Romney's Remorse."

nearest to God. And those who do not possess this love, or who have killed it in their earthly lives, must dwell henceforth in awful loneliness cast out from His Presence. 'Love is and was my Lord and King,' he says, offering his utter allegiance to the power that not only binds together persons in the present world, but still joins with a real bond of unity those living to those already passed 'behind the veil'; and in the strength of this surviving love he can address his 'dear heavenly friend' with the knowledge that he cannot die:—

Dear friend, far off, my lost desire,
So far, so near in woe and weal;
O loved the most when most I feel
There is a lower and a higher:

Known and unknown: human, divine:
Sweet human hand and lips and eye;
Dear heavenly friend that canst not die,
Mine, mine, for ever, ever mine;

Strange friend, past, present, and to be;
Loved deeplier, darklier understood;
Behold, I dream a dream of good,
And mingle all the world with thee.[1]

To Tennyson, sins against love are the greatest sins. In 'Aylmer's Field' the high pride of ancient line warred against, and triumphed over, the right of love, and resulted in a terrible punishment:—'Behold your house is left unto you desolate.' In the 'Idylls of the King' the fellowship of the Round Table was broken up by the triumph of Lust over Love. The two, indeed, so often superficially confused, are as far apart as the poles; the one an earthly passion, the other a Spiritual Reality. Love is the complete sacrifice of the personal good for the good of the beloved; lust the sacrifice of the other

[1] "In Memoriam," cxxix.

for the personal end, the gratification, heedless of consequence, of the individual desire. The one is essentially estranging and selfish, throwing back the individual more and more upon himself: the other is non-personal, and results in an ever-widening development. The one is sterile, and works itself out in final satiety; the other is fruitful, continually developing from the personal to the universal standpoint, until the love of one broadens into the love of all things, 'rising from the love of one to the love of two, and from the love of two to the love of all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair deeds, and from fair deeds to fair thoughts, till from fair thoughts he reaches on to the thought of the Uncreated loveliness, and at last knows what true beauty is.' [1]

> My love involves the love before;
> My love is vaster passion now;
> Tho' mix'd with God and Nature thou,
> I seem to love thee more and more.[2]

The contrast of these two is shown in two poems which should be considered together, the 'Vision of Sin' and 'Love and Duty.' In the first the soul desires lust, and is satisfied; has yielded itself freely to the demands of the flesh, and obtained the satiation of its craving; received its heart's desire, and 'leanness into the soul.' And the result is a 'gray and gap-tooth'd man,' not only sick of himself and loathing his own condition, but unable even to conceive of what pure Love can be, and scornful of the existence of that which he has himself rejected:—

> Friendship!—to be two in one—
> Let the canting liar pack!
> Well I know, when I am gone,
> How she mouths behind my back.
> . . . . . .

[1] Plato: "Symposium." [2] "In Memoriam," cxxx.

Fill the can and fill the cup:
All the windy ways of men
Are but dust that rises up,
And is lightly laid again.[1]

And although the disgust here displayed, and the bitter knowledge of his own utter failure to attain anything like satisfaction in fleshly pleasures, seems to show that a 'grain of conscience' remains; yet to one that has lost the power of loving it is difficult to conceive what hope the future can bring; and the end must be left uncertain.

At last I heard a voice upon the slope
Cry to the summit, 'Is there any hope?'
To which an answer peal'd from that high land,
But in a tongue no man could understand;
And on the glimmering limit far withdrawn
God made Himself an awful rose of dawn.[2]

In contrast with this is the poem 'Love and Duty,' asserting that to 'love that never found his earthly close' there will be a sequel; the acceptance of Duty with the retention of Love has lifted both souls into a higher sphere; and, even although this means bitter suffering without earthly fruition, yet they are the nobler through it, or 'three times less unworthy.' It is better to have loved and to have lost than never to have loved at all;

Wait, and Love himself will bring
The drooping flower of knowledge changed to fruit
Of Wisdom. Wait: my faith is large in Time
And that which shapes it to some perfect end.[3]

It was better to pass through this suffering, to love and yet to part, to have

Caught up the whole of life and uttered it
And bade adieu for ever,[4]

[1] "The Vision of Sin."
[2] "Love and Duty."
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*

than to have remained content with the

> Narrow brain, the stony heart,
> The staring eye glazed o'er with sapless days,
> The long mechanic pacings to and fro,
> The set gray life, and apathetic end.[1]

So also in the 'Idylls of the King' this is the lesson of the final ruin: Lancelot and Guinevere had sinned against love—he against the King's love for him and his love for the King; she against the King's love for her. Had they maintained their love pure and each kept faithful to the King their love for each other might have been lifted into this high region, and each, even on account of it, proved 'three times less unworthy.' But they had sought their own gratification; Love in each had become lust; and the consequence was the glorification of lust until it almost seemed to them to possess the binding force of true love, as something to which they must each yield faithfulness.

Despite the didactic and superior tone adopted by Arthur in his last farewell to Guinevere, this truth here at length becomes manifest. He had been 'too wholly true to dream untruth' in her; he can forgive her, despite all things; despite all things, he loves her still. And so, in the strength of this Love, Love conquers at the last; Guinevere recognises her sin, and acknowledges her terrible mistake:—

> Ah, my God,
> What might I not have made of thy fair world,
> Had I but loved thy highest creature here?
> It was my duty to have loved the highest:
> It surely was my profit had I known:
> It would have been my pleasure had I seen.
> We needs must love the highest when we see it,
> Not Lancelot, nor another.[2]

[1] "Love and Duty." [2] "Guinevere."

Will and the power of choice remain, for Tennyson, the fundamental conditions of morality; Love the ultimate test of the rightness of any action. Tennyson would agree with the statement of his fellow-poet:—

> For life, with all its yields of joy and woe
> And hope and fear, . . .
> Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love
> How love might be, has been indeed, and is.[1]

The same truth he has expressed in his own words:—

> Were there nothing else
> For which to praise the heavens, but only love,
> That only love were cause enough for praise.[2]

The sacrifice of personal happiness to the happiness of others, the deadening of the love of self, the paradox of the attainment of the highest development of the individual by the conscious sacrifice of the individual—'if I lose myself I find myself,'—this is the principle to be developed in the world, the object of human life. Here in Ethics there has been no advance on the ideal, because ethical advance was impossible. Intellectually, the world has changed; to us it presents a different appearance, it is, in effect, a different world from the world our 'true forefathers trod'; ethically it is the same. Love remains eternal; still, as of old time, the choice is offered to each individual—love against selfish absorption in himself, the claims of others against his own. Only by rejecting his own happiness and living for others, can his self find its true realisation; only by projecting himself beyond himself can he fulfil the law of his being. 'He that would find his life shall lose it; and he that shall lose his life shall find it,' is as clearly emphasised by the poet of

[1] Browning: "A Death in the Desert."
[2] "The Gardener's Daughter."

the nineteenth century as by the Founder of the religion of love.

When this principle is recognised we can see how mistaken are the charges levied against Tennyson's ethical teaching, that it was a preaching of the old doctrine of rewards and punishments, an establishment of virtue on the sanction of future individual success. In a sense, indeed, this is true; there is a reward which is imperatively required for unselfish action; but this is not a compensation, but a guarantee that this action is a real benefit, and not a shadowy illusion. It is one of the fundamental conditions of the human spirit that the Will, in constructing and striving towards ideal ends, shall believe in the possibility of these ends being realised. 'He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied' must ever remain the wages which morality can justly demand. And, because without immortality this is impossible, because the knowledge must gradually settle down upon mankind that it is futile to work for ends which from the nature of the case can never be attained, Tennyson is assured that ethical commands without the postulate of a future life lack the sanctions which would make them practically effective.

But in this it is not the reward that is sought, not the careful selection of the 'longest paying investment,' nor the anticipation of fourfold pleasures for all the effort expended and the pain endured. Virtue 'desires no isles of the blest, no golden seats of the just.' She can survive without any of these external aids. But what she does require, and what it is impossible for her to live without, is the 'Glory of going on, and not to die';[1] the assurance that it is not, after all, an illusion, a mere temporary disturbance, an unreal phenomenon; but that in the heart of things Virtue endures as part of

[1] "Wages."

the Eternal world. Existence in the minds and the lives of men cannot satisfy her; for she knows that in a little while the whole human race will have crumbled into dust. Virtue can persist, only if there is a survival beyond, and if the right Will continues in an immaterial world.

It is less the individual reward that Tennyson requires, than the guarantee that we 'have not lived in vain'; that all our strivings, all the ideals we construct, all the efforts we make after unselfish action, pass beyond the limitations of this world. Without this possibility they become meaningless.

> The Good, the True, the Pure, the Just—
> Take the charm 'For ever' from them, and they crumble into dust.[1]

Even Love itself, the fundamental element of morality, must die out or degenerate into mere self-gratification, if we are but once convinced of being 'magnetic mockeries,' handfuls of dust gathered up from the ground, and sinking back into the dust again.

> Yet if some voice that man could trust
> Should murmur from the narrow house,
> 'The cheeks drop in; the body bows;
> Man dies: nor is there hope in dust':
>
> Might I not say? 'Yet even here,
> But for one hour, O Love, I strive
> To keep so sweet a thing alive:'
> But I should turn mine ears and hear
>
> The moanings of the homeless sea,
> The sound of streams that swift or slow
> Draw down Æonian hills, and sow
> The dust of continents to be:
>
> And Love would answer with a sigh,
> 'The sound of that forgetful shore
> Will change my sweetness more and more,
> Half-dead to know that I shall die.'

[1] "Sixty Years After."

O me, what profits it to put
An idle case? If Death were seen
At first as Death, Love had not been,
Or been in narrowest working shut,

Mere fellowship of sluggish moods,
Or in his coarsest Satyr-shape
Had bruised the herb and crush'd the grape,
And bask'd and batten'd in the woods.[1]

The requirement of the religious consciousness is the guarantee of the continuance of this love. It is the guarantee which to many is alone provided by that religion which reveals a God suffering with and dying for men and assuring Everlasting Life to Eternal Love.

[1] "In Memoriam," xxxv.

X. NATURAL THEOLOGY

NATURAL THEOLOGY, the interpretation of reason in the phenomena of the external world, flourished unchecked in the writings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Those who abandoned belief in a God of revelation yet professed complete acceptance of a God of Nature. All philosophies, from the orthodoxy of Butler through the Deists of the Encyclopædia, to the timid scepticisms of Hume, demonstrated satisfactory evidence of the existence of a Divine Artificer. Yet all the time that men were thus engaged in formulating theories, Nature was not really being seen at all. The poets of the period dealt in studied and recognised formulas; and a conventional framework of stage pictures had taken the place of the wonder and beauty of the world of natural things. While optimistic theory abounded, accurate observation was abandoned; the complacent Deism, of which the 'Essay on Man' is the most famous example, depended on a view of Nature essentially artificial and unreal.

The re-discovery of Nature for the modern world is the work of the literature of the nineteenth century. Only at the commencement of the Romantic revival did Nature begin to exercise a real living influence upon Literature and upon Life. The doctrine taught by Rousseau and universally proclaimed by the writers of the revolutionary era, was the doctrine of the 'return to nature'; and this was soon interpreted to mean not only the adoption of a natural simplicity of life, but also the return to the sympathetic study of Nature herself, as the mighty Mother of humanity, and the Power able

to give healing to the souls of men. And, more especially when the first fervour of that period had spent itself, and men recoiled from its darker developments, turning with disgust from the scene of sordid motives and conflicting passions, they were able to find comfort and consolation in the contemplation of natural things. So, more and more, Nature commenced to occupy an increasing space in their imaginations. Wordsworth, recoiling from the 'heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world,' found this lightened by communion with the Great Spirit which he discovered in the world outside him, in the voices of the mountains and the sea. The beauty and calm and majesty of Nature gave him the rest he desired. And this was not simply his youthful feeling of delight in the obvious beauty of natural things appealing to the artistic sensibility—the colours and forms of 'the sounding cataract,' the 'tall rock,' 'the mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood'; not only satisfaction in the external presentation of Nature to the eye: it was the apprehension of a spiritual reality, responding to his own soul from the majesty and calm of the solitude that is 'among the lonely hills,' and of the rapture that is 'by the sounding shore.' It was an adventure below the surface view, resulting in the discovery of

> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.[1]

[1] "Lines written at Tintern Abbey."

He found, below the external beauty, a Spiritual principle; he recognised himself as one with the great World-Soul; in communion with this he was able to find a satisfaction denied to him in the contemplation of the fretful, troubled world of humanity around him. And so the other poets of the period, penetrating beneath the surface of things, had obtained messages of peace and consolation. However wearied and disgusted with the littleness and petty passions of men, they had always been able, as a recompense, to find God in Nature. To Shelley, Nature was the Life of Life, with her lips 'burning through the vest which seems to hide them'; the external form, but half concealing the spiritual beauty over which it forms but a thin veil.[1] To Goethe, Nature was the living garment of God, woven by the 'roaring loom of Time.'[2] And to many others the harmony so lacking in their own souls was discoverable in the world outside them. And so a kind of Natural Religion had grown up—the calm, the serenity of Nature preaching to the troubled souls of men, and bringing them rest and peace.

> A look of passionate desire
> O'er the sea and to the stars I send:
> 'Ye who from my childhood up have calm'd me,
> Calm me, ah, compose me to the end.'[3]

But in the later development of thought in the century a change passed over the scene. Before the advance of natural knowledge this natural religion shrivelled up and disappeared. Looming larger and larger in the imagination, Nature threatened to overwhelm man altogether. In the light of modern theories, the calm and the harmony were found to be illusory. Nature resolved

[1] "Prometheus Unbound."
[2] The Song of the Earth Spirit in Faust.
[3] Matthew Arnold: "Self-Dependence."

itself into a continual struggle for existence, none the less strenuous because silent, in which, through, apparently, the clumsiest methods, amid waste, suffering, and indifference, the fittest triumphed. Law, indeed, could be discovered, but it was a law from which morality seemed completely absent. The development of a higher, more complex life, was the result; but only at the seemingly unjust sacrifice of innumerable lower forms. Everything that is most characteristic of human morality and goodness appeared in direct opposition to the natural 'Cosmic Process' as interpreted by the conclusions of natural science. The contemplation of Nature ceased to satisfy either the intellect or the heart; to the heart it presented itself as a system blundering blindly forward, guided by laws either indifferent or opposed to the laws of goodness and of love; the intellect was relentlessly driven to the conception of a 'blind Nature impregnated by a great vivifying principle, and pouring forth from her lap, without discernment or parental care, her maimed and aborted children';[1] it could discern nothing in the external world but 'mere weather, doing and undoing without end.'

With the realisation of this knowledge a marked reaction set in against the satisfying Nature-worship of the early part of the century. "The visible surfaces of heaven and earth," says a great psychologist, "refuse to be brought by us into any intelligible unity at all. . . . Beauty and hideousness, love and cruelty, life and death, keep house together in indissoluble partnership; and there gradually steals over us, instead of the old warm notion of a man-loving Deity, that of an awful power that neither hates nor loves, but rolls all things together meaninglessly to a common doom. . . . Visible Nature is all plasticity and indifference . . . already we know

[1] Hume.

Nature too impartially, and too well, to worship unreservedly any God of whose character she can be an adequate expression. . . . The sick shudder of the frustrated religious demand proclaims the inevitable bankruptcy of Natural Religion." [1]

And this bewilderment caused by the new knowledge, and rejection of the worship of God as revealed in Nature, is reflected also by Tennyson. He approached Nature from a standpoint different to that of Wordsworth. Wordsworth knew Nature before he knew himself; Tennyson knew himself first. Wordsworth regarded man as a part of Nature; Tennyson contemplated man as opposed to Nature, judging Nature by a standard of morality above Nature, weighing up and condemning its methods. Wordsworth himself noted this difference. "He is not so much in sympathy with what I should myself most value in my attempts," he said of the younger poet; "the spirituality with which I have endeavoured to view the material universe, and the moral relations under which I have wished to exhibit its most ordinary appearances." For Tennyson, accepting more fully, perhaps, than any other poet the conclusions of modern science, is at times unable to find anything in Nature but trouble, confusion, and purposeless strife. He would endorse the principle laid down by Kant, that 'we cannot derive from Nature the idea of a moral being determined by the idea of a highest end.' Nature, in the light of modern thought, exhibits to him only apparently aimless conflict, continual struggle, and stress, extinction of individuals and types, development, with appalling waste and callousness, by the crudest methods, inability to satisfy the highest demands of the human spirit. 'I believe in God, not from what I see in Nature, but from what I see in men,' he once said; and many years after-

[1] James: "The Will to Believe," pp. 41, 42, 43.

wards he reiterated the same sentiment. 'God is love, transcendent, all-pervading; we do not get *this* faith from Nature or the world. If we look at Nature alone, full of perfection and imperfection, she tells us that God is disease, murder, and rapine.'[1] 'The lavish profusion of the natural world appals me.'[2] 'Ah me!' says his hero-king—

> Why is all around us here
> As if some lesser God had made the world,
> But had not force to shape it as he would,
> Till the high God behold it from beyond,
> And enter it, and make it beautiful?[3]

The contemplation of Nature, instead of being a help to religious faith, is rather the chief difficulty with which religious faith is forced to contend; it is now despite Nature, and not on account of Nature, that Tennyson clings to faith in a loving deity, trusting that God is love indeed,

> And love creation's final law—
> Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw
> With ravine, shrieked against his creed.[4]

The direct apprehension of Divinity in Nature, then, Tennyson is unable to recognise. The old comfortable natural theology, with its naïve teleological systems, and interpretation of wonderful adaptations to the needs of man, has vanished before the onward progress of scientific discovery; the reconcilement, the new teleology, has not yet been formulated. Man stands over against Nature, summing up and condemning her systems of progress. 'The threat that runs through all the winning music of the world' has become only too manifest, and destroys

[1] "Life of Tennyson," vol. i. p. 314.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] "The Passing of Arthur."
[4] "In Memoriam."

the satisfaction to be derived from the contemplation of the reign of law, or the beauty of natural things. Nature presents itself as a blind system blundering forward, continually evolving types only to destroy them, careless of the single life, careless of the wastefulness, careless of death and pain. 'All the music in her tone' becomes merely a 'hollow echo' of the music in the mind of man,[1] the projection from himself into the world behind phenomena of something which is not really there present. The objects, formerly rest-bringing and peaceful, have now acquired a new and awful significance. 'The light of setting suns' reflect to the observer the transitoriness of his own existence, and the existence of the race with which are bound up all his highest aspirations and desires; the sight of the stars convinces him of his own infinitesimal littleness, and burns and brands 'his nothingness into man.'[2] Trees and flowers and the living garment of the hills and the strange innumerable forms of animal life but re-echo the tale of changing types produced by the exigencies of a blind craving for existence, and an evolution forward from a primitive chaos to an unknown goal.

Under these circumstances, and with Nature no longer helpful, but 'lending evil dreams,' the poet turns from the contemplation of her workings, or only occupies himself with the superficial aspect of things—the play of colour, the beauty of form, the music of sound—natural objects as presenting themselves to the artist limiting his vision to the outward show, without attempting to probe beneath the surface, and ascertain their real secrets. No poet possessed a more delicate sensitiveness to this aspect of the external world. No poet has described with such unique accuracy and fidelity, its

[1] "In Memoriam," iii.
[2] "Maud."

fascinating changeful beauty. In a series of exquisite cameos, exhibiting most careful observation with a very real consciousness of her charm, Tennyson has drawn Nature in all her sad and happy moods. The quiet of a summer evening, the tranquil peace of a summer night, cloud wrack and tempest, the sunshine on the hills, the mystery of the forests, the glory of the sea with its 'stormy crests that smoke against the skies,' every changing aspect of the changeful season, the fruitfulness of Spring, the gorgeous exuberance of Summer, the 'happy Autumn fields,' all these Tennyson depicts with a faithfulness and a beauty which stamp him as at once in the very first rank of poets of Nature. The general result of the study of his work is a deeper and firmer realisation of the marvellous attractiveness of the variegated scenery of the natural world.

But all this, it must be noted, is very different from its treatment by the older poets, and from the assertion of a Natural Theology and a Natural Religion. Below the surface, Nature to Tennyson exhibits a chaos, in many ways doubtful of interpretation, in most ways unmeaning. And after one great struggle with the conclusions apparently involved in this study, he refused to re-open the question. The end of Nature, if end there be, we cannot at present ascertain; to us with our limited knowledge it seems something altogether divergent from the end of humanity. 'Back to Nature,' the old panacea for the difficulties of human life, provides now no cry of satisfaction; it merely presents the same problems in a more inexplicable form. Once Tennyson had dealt with the whole problem; and the result had been a final appeal to faith.

> Falling with my weight of cares
> Upon the great world's altar stairs
> That slope through darkness up to God.

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.[1]

And having once passed through this stage of feeling, he refused again to allow the question to disturb him, and put it resolutely aside. He confined his thought to the world of men, and the aspect of Nature as immediately exhibited to the observer:—

I saw him in the shining of the stars,
I marked him in the flowering of the fields.[2]

And so long as these are taken as they appear, the beauty of the starlit sky as presented to the eye, the external glory of the summer flowers, then the difficulties cease. Whilst one can rest content in this feeling, contemplating Nature in all its changing beautiful manifestations, one can be satisfied; to penetrate below the surface, to seek unity, purpose, or moral law behind phenomena, can only produce confusion and despair.

Nor would Tennyson accept premature answers to the difficulty, propounded by those, who, with our imperfect knowledge, would justify the ways of God to man, and attempt at the expense either of our intelligence or of our ideal of goodness, to bring the laws of Nature, as at present revealed to us, into agreement with our highest moral ideals. We may consider for example the one question of suffering in Nature—'the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain,' as exhibited to all careful observers. Tennyson would not repeat the answers proposed by would-be optimists, deeming them mere special pleadings or ingenious misconceptions. 'Animals suffer little,' says one class of apologists, who laboriously endeavour to prove the exaggeration of the suffering of

[1] "In Memoriam," lv. [2] "Passing of Arthur."

the sentient world. This is no answer. The difficulty is that they should suffer at all. One single pang of pain, if purposeless, is enough to destroy belief in an all-wise, all-merciful God. Pain as such is real; no future pleasure can destroy that pain. However little in amount, it remains as great a difficulty as ever. The pain of one conscious being, if real, presents the problem in all its perplexity. Either it could not have been prevented, in which case God is not all-powerful; or it could have been prevented with the attainment of the same end, in which case God is not all-good; for we know at least that our highest human ideal of goodness is not compatible with the imposition of the slightest amount of purposeless suffering. Not by minimising its amount, but by showing either its unreality or its purposeful effect, not only for others, but for the individual who suffers it, can the moral demands of man be satisfied.

'Given the necessity of susceptibility to pain as the condition of an organism capable of enjoying pleasure,' says another, 'the matter becomes simple'; but it may be fairly demanded, why thus given? There is no such necessity controlling an All-Powerful Providence. With God all things are possible. To talk of necessity in His case is meaningless. Nor is the necessity as a matter of fact present. Pleasure is a positive feeling, and not dependent on pain for its existence, however much it may appear to be so under present conditions. "To suppose that pleasure must always have pain as a background would be to misunderstand the law of relativity; it is most impressive when it follows upon pain, but it may also perfectly well have as background a weaker feeling of pleasure."[1]

'Development and progress are dependent on the suffering of the individual,' says a third; 'the individual

[1] Hoffding: "Psychology."

perishes, but the race progresses.' But where is the justice of the sacrificing of the individual for the race, if the sacrifice is enforced and not consciously accepted. Why should the men of the present be compelled to suffer pain in order that in the future the men of a coming race may be more highly organised to appreciate pleasure? Why should the lower be sacrificed for the development of the higher?

Moreover, pain is not measurable by its purpose, at least to finite intelligence. Could mankind be assured that each single consciousness of pain was producing some compensating good somewhere, how much more readily would pain be endured. Did one know that by cheerful acceptance of even the worst physical agony someone else was relieved from suffering, how much less impatience would be exhibited at its continuance. The unendurable thought is purposeless pain, pain that is real and torturing while it lasts, and yet results in no definite good to anyone when over. If God was a consistently malevolent being the world might be endurable, and a system of ethics contrived in defiance of His power, or elusion of His punishment. Were God simply capricious, a theory for which indeed there appears much apparent evidence, it would be possible to organise action designed to appease His anger and placate His wrath; as Caliban, thinking 'He dwelleth in the cold of the moon,' and 'hating that He cannot change his cold nor cure his ache,' holds that in return He plays with the pleasures and the pains of men; and upon this basis devises rules of conduct, which enable him to escape His jealousy, and elude His anger.

> Lo! 'Lieth flat and loveth Setebos:
> 'Maketh his teeth meet through his upper lip:
> Will let these quails fly, will not eat this month,
> One little mess of whelks, so he may 'scape. [1]

[1] Browning: "Caliban on Setebos."

But the one unendurable thought, and the one thought to which the arguments of these would-be interpreters of the incomprehensible ways of God seem inevitably to lead, is the thought of an amiable, well-meaning, but blundering Intelligence, a God who dislikes suffering, but could not devise means to give happiness without pain; a God who delights in upward Evolution, but can only promote it by a costly and clumsy process; a God who presents certain beauties, but is unable to overcome the difficulties of constructing a perfect world; who consequently, contemplates in the work of His creation a certain amount of meaningless misery, but hopes that somehow the end will justify the means, and the past sadness will be forgotten in future joy.

Tennyson was surely right to reject premature syntheses on these conditions, and, with our present imperfect knowledge, to throw back the argument from reason to faith. This impious doctrine of a Divine Government, which seems to be the more or less avowed position of many who at present attempt to produce a consistent system of Natural Theology, could not be accepted as a satisfactory theory of the world. Things are; it is futile to argue why they are not different; ingenious explanation but increases the difficulty of the problem. We can but recognise that knowledge at present is a 'beam in darkness'; perhaps, much now obscure to us will in the future be made clear. But with only our present data upon which to reason, our attitude must be that of faith; trust that the good is overcoming the ill,

> That not a moth with vain desire
> Is shrivelled in a fruitless fire,
> Or but subserves another's gain;[1]

[1] "In Memoriam," liv

trust that all things are sweeping forward in steady, irresistible progress towards their consummation in that

> One far-off divine event,
> To which the whole creation moves.[1]

Tennyson having once clearly grasped this position, and having frankly recognised that at present Natural Theology can be developed into no consistent system, was yet able to return to Nature with fresh interest and fresh satisfaction. For there is much in the Natural World which appeals to the strong unchangeable belief, lying deep in the heart of man, that, despite outward appearance, 'all is well.' He found there, for example, the ascertainable *order* in Nature, present despite the apparent changefulness of change; and this, with his instinctive reverence for Law, especially appealed to him. 'As he exulted in the wilder aspects of Nature,' says his son, 'so he felt a joy in her orderliness; he felt a rest in her steadfastness, patient progress and hopefulness; the same seasons ever returned, the same stars wheeled in their courses; the flowers and trees blossomed, and the birds sang yearly in their appointed months.'[2] Taking the Universe in the widest sweep of human thought indeed, nothing remained fixed, everything pressed forward, all was Becoming; the very laws of change themselves were changing. But in the experience of men Nature presented a system of laws which could be reckoned upon, which could be regarded as valid, which could, within certain limits, be trusted not to fail. Day and night, seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, had not ceased from the earth; and man could direct his movements upon firm ground in the present, and base his action

[1] "In Memoriam," Epilogue.
[2] "Life of Tennyson," vol. i. p. 312.

upon a faith which would not prove him false, in the constancy of Law in the immediate future.

And, in addition to this order and steadfastness, Tennyson emphasised another aspect of Nature, as exhibited in her fascinating Beauty, when regarded even in her superficial aspects. To the observant eye Nature presents a series of marvellous pictures; and through long-continued association, the mere combinations of form and colour take upon themselves a real spiritual significance, from the reading into them of the passions and the hopes of man.

> The clouds that gather round the setting sun
> Do take a sober colouring from the eye
> That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality.[1]

The sight of distant horizons give him a whisper 'from some fair dawn beyond the doors of death'; the 'happy autumn fields' fill him with the sadness of irrecoverable things and 'the days that are no more.' And this is not simply the 'pathetic fallacy,' the interpreting of Nature by his own emotions; the spirituality is in a sense objective; there is a real beauty in itself, and a message appealing to those who will be attentive to its manifestation. Apart altogether from scientific interpretation and the 'reign of Law,' Nature exhibits an inexplicable mystery and beauty; 'the glory of the sum of things' speaks at times with an insistence that cannot be neglected; something from without appears to touch chords in the harp of life, which otherwise would never vibrate into music; and in moments of high rapture, the conviction is irresistibly borne home that 'all is well.' 'Looking out on the great landscape he had wonderful thoughts about God and the Universe, and felt as if looking into the other world.'[2] Tennyson has felt this

[1] Wordsworth: "Ode on Immortality." [2] "Life."

indestructible conviction that there is some spiritual reality behind all things, which nothing can altogether destroy; a beauty, not simply in the form and colour, but a Power that can touch us to deeper thoughts and higher feelings; as if someone is striving to speak to us, to whose message we may often be inattentive, but which at times impresses us with a marvellous sense of spiritual apprehension. We seem to be on the verge of a great discovery, to catch a voice speaking in tones almost loud enough for us to hear, giving a sense of strain sometimes almost intolerable, that the real truth of things is almost within our grasp.

All through the scattered visions of the Natural world in 'In Memoriam,' this view is enforced. At first they are nothing but wild and restless; afterwards they are found whispering peace and comfort to the sorrowful heart. The wonder of the dawn, the appealing beauty of the flowers, the evening star 'Hesper watching all things dim and dimmer and a glory gone,' the fading snow, the coming of Spring-time,

> The songs, the stirring air,
> The life re-orient out of dust,
> Cry through the sense to hearten trust
> In that which made the world so fair.[1]

And so Tennyson prays that the 'ambrosial air,' 'sweet after showers,' may sigh

> The full new life that feeds thy breath
> Throughout my frame, till Doubt and Death
> Ill-brethren, let the fancy fly
>
> From belt to belt of crimson seas,
> On leagues of odour streaming far,
> To where in yonder orient star,
> A hundred voices whisper 'Peace.'[2]

[1] "In Memoriam," lxxxvi. [2] *Ibid.* cxvi.

Passages like these, scattered at intervals through his poetry, and exhibiting a feeling not always manifested, point towards a hope that, despite the abandonment of the older teleology, and the acceptance of the dismal conclusions of modern science, the last word has not been said on the matter; that in the future, with further light, and by some process he did not apprehend, the conception of the Divine in Nature might be restored. The power of the external world to move us to sadness and regret, inarticulate tears, or buoyant unreasoning happiness, seems to indicate that we are not merely 'dying Nature's earth and lime,' and that something is there, congruous to ourselves, of which some day we may apprehend the meaning.

Yet these moments of high rapture are all too short, and all too scattered. 'Revealing visions come and go'; when they come we *feel* that we *know*; but in the intervals we must pass though states in which all is dark, and in which we can only struggle to hold the conviction that

> Power is with us in the night
> Which makes the darkness and the light,
> And dwells not in the light alone.'[1]

And these scattered thoughts lead Tennyson to the acceptance of a possibility which he never clearly asserted, but which appears to indicate the line along which future speculation must travel.

> My son, the world is dark with griefs and graves,
> So dark that men cry out against the Heavens.
> Who knows but that the darkness is in man?[2]

[1] Professor Sidgwick, in "Life of Tennyson," vol. i. p. 304.
[2] "The Ancient Sage."

In the Universe, as we apprehend it, how much is provided from without, how much from within?

> Dark is the world to thee: thyself art the reason why.[1]

And the real world contemplated *sub specie aeternitatis* instead of *sub specie temporis*, by one who can see all things as they are, and the 'serene result of all,' may indeed appear 'wholly fair.' Tennyson does not go so far as to insist on this point of view, does not fully enter into the position of the Christian philosophy which asserts, with such firm and triumphant faith, that by the purification of the tainted personalities of men will be effected the restitution of all things.

But he at least suggests that our knowledge is not absolute; that future generations may see things under different aspects; that with a deeper insight into

> That true world within the world we see,
> Whereof our world is but the bounding shore,[2]

the world which surrounds each one of us, but which we can only apprehend as in a dream, a picture in our minds, how distorted from reality we cannot tell, we may once more be able to recognise the Divine in Nature, and to acknowledge all things as very good. This is as much as we can hope for in the present state of our ignorance; and although we may emphasise the trains of thought which seem to suggest the possibility of this conclusion, we must not do so at the expense of truth, or neglect the darker aspect of the world.

Nature exhibits to us much that is inexplicable, and much that seems to us incompatible with an all-loving God. The attitude of mind towards these mysteries must be the attitude of faith; refusal to acquiesce in

[1] "The Higher Pantheism."
[2] "De Profundis."

attempts at synthesis, which serve only to weaken either our intelligence or our highest ideal of God as good. Yet we must recognise that 'as the essence of courage is to stake one's life on a possibility, so the essence of faith is to believe that the possibility exists';[1] and having once grasped this faith, we must refuse to allow vain speculation to paralyse right action. And in the personal assertion of that belief, which can justify and provide motive power for practical effort, we may endeavour, by the fulfilment of the highest Ethical demands of life, to attain to a knowledge imperfectly revealed to the purely speculative intellect; until from the summit of this 'Mount of Blessing' we may behold the 'dawn of more than mortal day strike on the Mount of Vision.'

> Since
> The key to that weird casket, which for thee
> But holds a skull, is neither thine nor mine
> But in the hand of what is more than man.
> . . . . . .
> Let be thy wail and help thy fellow men,
> . . . . . .
> And lay thine uphill shoulder to the wheel,
> And climb the Mount of Blessing, whence, if thou
> Look higher, then—perchance—thou mayest—beyond
> A hundred ever-rising mountain lines,
> And past the range of Night and Shadow—see
> The high-heaven dawn of more than mortal day
> Strike on the Mount of Vision.[2]

[1] Salter, quoted by James: "The Will to Believe," p. 62.
[2] "The Ancient Sage."

XI. SPIRITUAL RELIGION

THE religion which Tennyson maintained, when translated from the region of intellectual speculation to the region of practical affairs and interpreted as a motive power in daily life, took upon itself certain characteristics in many ways differing from the practical morality advocated by those most in sympathy with his intellectual beliefs. The nature of his mind, and the effect of his early influences, became manifest in all his teaching. Nothing is more noticeable, in this connection, than his continual opposition and hatred to the ideals of asceticism, and to the revival of a purely spiritual religion which has formed such a marked feature of the past century. A faith which did not exhibit its practical side in a morality made clear to the whole world, in the redressal of human wrongs and the struggle with manifest evil, was, for Tennyson, a faith to be unreservedly condemned as lacking the necessary characteristic of a true religion. Religion unaccompanied by an ethical code, which even those who refuse allegiance to its demands must unhesitatingly admire, received from Tennyson but scant tolerance. And in consequence of this, together with a somewhat warped view of history, that spiritual and ascetic religion which developed throughout the early growth of the Christian Church, and, flourishing unchecked in the Middle Age, has partially died out during the last few centuries amongst the progressive races of Europe, was regarded by him as a grievous error, a misdirection of the powers of the human soul, producing in the end evil rather than good. So, in his poetry, we can find at

intervals pictures of the ascetic ideal which can only be regarded as caricatures. Such is, for example, St Simeon on his pillar, with his self-inflicted lacerations designed to 'appease an angry God,' and his querulous clamour for sainthood. So again, in the 'Idylls of the King,' the ascetic ideal is depicted in Pellam the King, who had been converted from Paganism to this harmful form of belief. 'Once a Christless foe of thine,' says Arthur's ambassador;—

> But seeing that thy realm
> Hath prospered in the name of Christ, the King
> Took as in rival heat, to holy things;
> And finds himself descended from the saint.
> . . . . . .
> He boasts his life as purer than thine own;
> Eats scarce enough to keep his pulse abeat;
> Hath pushed aside his faithful wife, nor lets
> Or dame or damsel enter at his gates
> Lest he should be polluted.[1]

And when we find, later on, that his shrine was a place 'in which he scarce could spy the Christ for saints,' it is not difficult for us to understand what form of religion Tennyson thinks that he is here depicting. And the moral is clearly enforced; the court, left without guidance, sinks into a hotbed of corruption, with Sir Garlon, the deputy king, as head, mocking at all the common sanctities of life; and the outward ruin is but a type of the inward destruction,

> The hall
> Of Pellam, lichen-bearded, grayly-draped,
> With streaming grass, appeared, low-built but strong;
> The ruinous donjon as a knoll of moss,
> The battlement overtopt with ivy tods,
> A home of bats, in every tower an owl.[2]

[1] "Balin and Balan." *Ibid.*

And Tennyson's views on this subject are still more emphatically enforced in the 'Holy Grail,' in which the spiritual religion, the pursuit of the Grail, drawing the knights of the Round Table away from their duty of subduing the heathen, and speeding order and civilisation, leaves them, for the most part, 'lost in the quagmires,' following 'wandering fires,' and furnishes one of the chief causes of the final catastrophe — the destruction of the kingdom of Arthur.

Tennyson, indeed, was a poet as well as a religious teacher; and, as a poet, he was unable to refuse recognition to the beauty of the ascetic ideal. So we find occasional acknowledgment of its grandeur in such poems as 'Sir Galahad' and 'St Agnes' Eve,' in which one moment's emotion is caught up and crystallised for ever. But this high spiritual fervour he only regards as possible, or in any way desirable, for the few; and the admiration is reluctantly extorted, while the principle, as applied to the many, is firmly condemned. Even in the most perfect picture of the ascetic saint, the sister of Percivale in the 'Holy Grail,' the emotion is only the result of rejected human love:

> Such a fervent flame of human love,
> Which, *being rudely blunted*, glanced and shot
> Only to Holy things.[1]

And we may conclude that had it not thus been 'rudely blunted,' the love would have been more naturally lavished upon some earthly husband. Indeed, Tennyson's bitterness on this subject appears mainly due to his condemnation of the ascetic doctrine of the glorification of celibacy over the married state. Tennyson, like his friend and contemporary poet, Charles Kingsley, had experienced a perfect marriage; both, consequently, were

[1] "The Holy Grail."

totally unable to appreciate the strength of the celibate ideal. And just as the latter writer felt impelled to war against it in all his varied novels, and to introduce discussions on the respective merits of the single or married condition amongst the Elizabethan seamen, or the last of the Saxons, or the Christians of Alexandria in the fifth century, so Tennyson's ideal of the love of one maiden, and the cleaving to her, furnishes for him a fundamental principle, the denial of the validity of which he doubts not, partakes of the nature of a sin.

Tennyson compares the ascetic ideal with the selfish isolation of the individual in the pursuit of beauty, and prophesies for it a similar result. In the 'Palace of Art,' the soul built itself a lordly pleasure-house; and, surrounding itself with everything that could appeal to the refined and delicate taste, determined to live for the worship of beauty alone. Men outside were neglected and forgotten, or only thought of as 'darkening droves of swine that range on yonder plain.' Art and beauty were to minister to the ideal life; everything ugly, coarse, or distracting was to be abolished; all the turmoil and petty passions of men were to be excluded from this calm serenity. And the result was corruption, loathing, and despair; a hatred equally of death and life; ruin of the soul, and a passionate crying:—

> I am on fire within.
> There comes no murmur of reply.
> What is it that will take away my sin,
> And save me lest I die?[1]

Tennyson places on a similar footing, and condemns with a similar judgment, the withdrawal of the soul within herself for a spiritual religion. Goodness, no less than beauty, he maintains, cannot be pursued divorced from

[1] "The Palace of Art."

'the kindly race of men.' Pride, vain-glory, scorn of self, neglect of duty, these are the natural results of such a mistake; and the whole lesson of his teaching is the same as that of the modern philosopher, that there is no path to the higher and nobler life except the path of duty, and the fulfilment of the offices of a good parent, and an honest citizen.[1]

But in thus insisting on the selfishness of asceticism, and emphasising its more grotesque forms, and associating it with the solitary worship of beauty, Tennyson misunderstands the true nature of its ideal. It has been said that in 'St Simeon Stylites,' 'the true Middle Age of Missal and Cathedral speaks through Tennyson's 'St Simeon upon his pillar.'' [2] Never was a statement more untrue. The finer elements of this religion Tennyson could never understand, because he was himself lacking in their necessary features; for the religion of Catholicism at its highest, the religion of the great ascetics who have been the wonder or despair of future generations, was altogether dependent on one fact, and on one fact alone—the certainty of the presence of God, and the direct consciousness of Sin—the consciousness of Sin intensified by the presence of God. Asceticism is not an endeavour to appease God by grotesque self-inflicted suffering; not an attempt to obtain honour or credit with God by voluntary endurance of pain. It is the consciousness, presented in a great modern writer, 'making me rest in the thought of two, and two only, absolute and luminously self-evident beings in the Universe — myself and God'; [3] and the feeling resulting from this, as expressed by the Psalmist when the thought fills him, 'Thou hast set our misdeeds

[1] *Cf.* Green: "Prolegomena to Ethics."
[2] Scudder: "The Life of the Spirit," p. 151.
[3] Newman: "Apologia."

before *Thee*; and our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.' This it was that drove men into those wild outbreaks of self-laceration, and hurled them forth from the haunts of men into the wilderness and the desert; if only they could escape from that body of death; if only they could tear out from themselves this desire after Sin. The awful majesty and purity of God, the littleness and utter sinfulness of men, the ever-present consciousness of the presence of their Maker and Judge, formed the motive power of ascetic and spiritual religion. The whole spirit is gathered up in the 'Dies Irae,' the flower of the poetry of the Middle Ages.

Judex ergo cum sedebit,
Quid-quid latet apparebit,
Nil inultum remanebit.

Rex tremendae magestatis,
Qui salvandos salvas gratis
Salva me, fons pietatis.
. . . . . .
Ingemisco tanquam reus,
Culpa rubet vultus meus,
Supplicanti parce, Deus.

Before this sudden revelation the claims of humanity around, a humanity visibly dying, suddenly shrank into insignificance. The joys of this earthly existence ceased to allure; even effort to alleviate pain or restore social order seemed strangely misdirected; the world was a place of probation all too short, the passing years were hurrying men forward with but a brief period of preparation towards the day when each would stand alone in the visible presence of God.

And this haunting realisation of God's presence in the world was characteristic of the minds of the Middle Ages; stronger in some, weaker in others, never quite absent. With this feeling Tennyson could never adequately

sympathise, because he never thus directly apprehended the existence of a personal Deity. For Tennyson self is real, and other selves are real, and love between these and mutual help and assistance are the foundations of religion and morality. With the mystics self is real, and God is real, and all else is but shadow. Sin must be fought with heroic remedies, torn out, if by bodily suffering; otherwise the soul cannot survive the burning fire of the purity of God. For Tennyson a righteous Deity is a secondary deduction from phenomena around him, not a direct personal experience of the soul. He is forced to postulate a God ruling and working behind the outward show of things—a God 'in whom we live and move and have our being'; but a God who rarely, if ever, comes into direct personal relation with His creatures, never contemplating the soul laid bare before Him who is all Holy, all Perfect, and all Pure.

And, consequently, the consciousness of Sin as alienating from God never seems to enter into Tennyson's poetry. Sin with him is always violation of appointed law, or refusal of common duty, or neglect of the right action clearly evident. Its effects are only too manifest in the world around; the cause of disorder and ruin, outrage against love, the fruitful origin of misery and of pain. But sin against humanity, sin as practical adherence to the lower course, is different from sin as directly chosen in the presence of God. 'Against Thee only have I sinned,' says the Psalmist, 'and done this evil in Thy sight.' In the face of this tremendous fact all the minor effects of sin appeared unimportant. And the same feeling is the motive power of the spiritual religion; no renunciation was too great, no asceticism too extreme, no self-imposed suffering too hard to bear, if only by the sacrifice of the body the sin might be extirpated, and the soul one day stand perfect before God.

But with Tennyson God is a God 'who hideth Himself,' who shows Himself only in His works, through dim and cloudy visions; and consequently this direct certainty of His presence is not to be found in his poems. But this was the feeling of the hermits and the saints; and recognising this we can see how false is the comparison of their religion with the satisfaction of the soul in the contemplation of beauty. There was no withdrawal, as in the case of the 'Palace of Art,' no solitude in which the soul could moulder into deep loathing of itself; rather was the world around more alive, and the spiritual world more real, and the air peopled with angelic and demoniacal watchers, and everything luminous in the great searching light of the presence of God.

So that we can understand how completely Tennyson, in such a poem as 'St Simeon Stylites,' has misunderstood the ascetic ideal. The hermit on his pillar here exhibits a somewhat contemptible figure, enduring hardship, racked with pains

> Thrice ten years,
> Thrice multiplied by superhuman pangs,
> In hungers and in thirsts, fevers and cold,
> In coughs, aches, stitches, ulcerous throes and cramps,[1]

for what object?—to be recognised as a saint, to gain a little higher place in the company of Heaven. 'I will not cease to grasp the hope I hold of saintdom,' he says, 'Who may be made a Saint if I fail here?' And he proceeds to draw the contrast;—

> Bethink Thee, Lord, while Thou and all the Saints
> Enjoy themselves in heaven, ...
> I 'twixt the spring and downfall of the light,
> Bow down one thousand and two hundred times,
> To Christ, the Virgin Mother, and the Saints.[2]

[1] "St Simeon Stylites." [2] *Ibid.*

This was not the spirit of the martyrs and the saints of old. The shortness of time, the immensity of eternity, the hunger of the soul for God, the consciousness of its own sinfulness keeping it back from that union, the determination to destroy this sin—this is the secret of the strength of the ascetic life. And these emotions, which have never been completely eradicated, which appear now stronger, now weaker, at different periods of the world's history, will prevent this ideal from ever altogether fading from the minds of men. '*Si l'homme n'est pas fait pour Dieu, pourquoi n'est-il heureux qu'en Dieu?*'[1] 'Thou hast fashioned us, O Lord, for Thee; and the human heart is restless, till it finds rest in Thee.'[2] 'Vanity of Vanities, and all is vanity, save the love of God and the serving Him alone.'[3]

In considering Tennyson's treatment of this subject, we are not merely dealing with problems of historical importance, or misread motives of past generations. All his interest was with the present; and in these poems, at first sight concerned only with old forgotten far-off things, he was really combating an ideal which in his own time was exhibiting a surprising renaissance. It is in this light that we must consider 'The Holy Grail'; an allegory, yet in a sense a real story unfolding Tennyson's clearest teaching of the evil effects of the ascetic conception of the object of life. Marking as it does perhaps the very high watermark of his poetic inspiration, its influence cannot easily be overrated; and its deliberate purpose merits a careful consideration of the problem set forth, and the answer given.

Tennyson's condemnation of Spiritual Religion in this poem, is intensified by two other elements in his mind—his abhorrence of all extremes, of sentiment that appears to

[1] Pascal: "Pensees." [2] "St Augustine: Confessions."
[3] "De Imitatione Christi."

him extravagant or exaggerated; and his inability to comprehend the real success of apparent failure. He deplores the excesses of asceticism as much as those of passionate political idealism, because both presented too high an ideal for the attainment of the ordinary man. A Galahad may reveal its beauty; a Percivale may come unscathed from the great trial; the rest will perish miserably on the journey. And it seems to him better not to set out on the pursuit of the Holy Grail, unless success can be assured.

The search for the Holy Grail combined with an outbreak of Sensuality, its natural consequence to destroy the great cause, and ensure the final destruction of Arthur's kingdom, and the fellowship of the Round Table. In the spiritual intoxication produced by the sight of the beatific vision the knights had sworn to follow it throughout the world; leaving 'human wrongs to right themselves,' they had ridden forth on their long journey; and most of them, as the King bitterly prophesied, had followed 'wandering fires, lost in the quagmire.' But the failure was itself due to their own sinfulness; had they been pure and single-hearted they would all have attained their desire, and entered the Spiritual City. And might it not perhaps, after all, have been better to pursue phantom lights, with the hunger for the vision of the Grail in the heart, than to continue to lead the old pleasant life at Camelot, with its acquiescence in the imperfect condition accompanied by the protest that the Quest was not for them. 'We needs must love the highest when we see it'; this is surely the noblest ideal, even if for ever unfulfilled. 'But we desire not the fair, but the fairest of all; if we find aught else we shall have failed.'

'Lost to me and gone,' says the King bitterly, at the end of the year's search,

And left me gazing at a barren board,
And a lean Order—scarce returned a tithe—
And out of those to whom the vision came
My greatest hardly will believe he saw;
Another hath beheld it afar off,
And leaving human wrongs to right themselves,
Cares but to pass into the silent life.
And one hath had the vision face to face,
And now his chair desires him here in vain,
However they may crown him otherwhere.[1]

And this one side of the picture is conspicuous; the ruin of the earthly kingdom, the apparent undoing of the life-work of the king, the Christian monarchy, so laboriously erected, reeling back 'into the beast.' But there is another side also to be considered. The earthly kingdom is not all; sooner or later the earthly kingdom must go. The Perfect vision once having been seen, was it not better to make the choice of the fairest, even if it was for ever unattainable? "Plato has profoundly defined man 'the hunter of truth'; for in this chase, as in others, the *pursuit* is all in all, the success comparatively nothing. 'Did the Almighty,' says Lessing, 'holding in his right hand Truth, and in his left search after Truth, deign to proffer me the one I might prefer, in all humility, but without hesitation, I should request 'Search after Truth.'" [2]

To Lancelot the vision was denied. Yet Lancelot, searching after the glory of the Grail, blinded because of his sin, yet urged on his fruitless quest by the hope that the touch and sight of the Holy Thing might pluck his sin from him, is surely a greater figure than Lancelot at Camelot, an open friend and secret traitor to the King. And although in his search madness came upon

[1] "The Holy Grail."
[2] Sir W. Hamilton: "Philosophy of Perception," p. 39.

him, and 'whipt him into waste fields far away,' and he was 'beaten down by little men,' and drifted over the great sea, and at length only descried dimly the cup of God's wrath, in anger seven times heated, surrounded by 'great angels, awful shapes and wings and eyes,' he was yet the greater for his quest, and, although failing, higher for his failure. And not only Galahad, with the Holy Grail ever present before him night and day, finally guiding him to

> The spiritual city and all its spires
> And gateways, like a glory of one pearl,

but Sir Bors, a prisoner to the Paynims, and Percivale, journeying through the land of sand and thorns, with everything he meets turning into dust at his touch, and all the nameless host who had perished in the marshes and the dark forests had yet perhaps risen, despite the failure, to a higher success than they could attain in the life of the camp and the court and the city. 'Came you on none but phantoms on your quest?' asks the patient old monk Ambrosius, 'no men nor women?' 'On such a quest,' says Percivale, 'men and women are but as phantoms.' The spiritual has become the reality; the eternal world has become revealed beneath the material; and even if this results in destruction, to those who perish without hope, but enduring faithful to the end, shall one day be given the revelation of the Glory of the Lord.

'Have ye seen a cloud?' says Arthur to his knights, on finding they have sworn the vow; 'What went ye in the wilderness to see?' And he had cause for his anger; for, a year after, the few surviving knights return to Camelot, through the grass-grown streets, amid the crumbling ruins of their once goodly city and palace, to find the old order gone for ever. Yet it was better

to fail in such a quest, even if it meant unknown death without the sight of the vision, than to succeed in some lower ideal. 'One hath seen,' says Arthur, 'and all the blind will see.' In the spiritual realm it is better for the blind to seek the sight, even if it means their own destruction; and not only he that attains, but he that endures to the end, shall be saved. Gawain had failed, because he had abandoned the quest as not for him. But those who had sought steadfastly, though sought in vain, had not failed; those who had perished still faithful to the Quest had not failed. They had vowed to follow the Fairest; they had seen for one moment the revelation of the Eternal Beauty; in their choice of the Unattainable, they would be justified rather than those who had refused the task as impossible. The 'desire of the moth for the star,' the yearning of the soul for God, in its very earthly failure may be heavenly success. It may be the duty of mankind here to pursue a hopeless ideal; to seek after 'the high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,' trusting that, by 'clinging to the highest,' despite inability through weakness to behold the Vision, the fleshly, stained, imperfect, human soul may 'one day see God.'

The laments and the accusations of Arthur are the common reproaches of the world. 'One has seen and all the blind will see.' 'Have ye seen a cloud?' 'What go ye to the wilderness to see?' These are the scornful queries addressed by the world to those who refuse to bow down to its idols. Little comprehending the motives of those who have 'passed into the silent life,' it sees many who might have ministered to its necessities, or attained greatness according to its standard, withdraw themselves from its councils, and decline to acquiesce in its conventional and comfortable morality.

The sight of these fills it with a blind and inarticulate fury; it accuses them, now of self-absorption in their own salvation, now of hypocrisy and spiritual pride, now of destroying powers which were intended for development, and of alienating the good by the preaching of an impossible ideal. But not until the final judgment, when 'all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light,' can it be decided who have succeeded and who have failed. "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold a man gluttonous and a wine-bibber'; and John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He hath a devil'; but Wisdom *is justified of all her children.*"

'There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit'; and 'God fulfils Himself in many ways lest one good custom should corrupt the world.'[1] Tennyson had learnt from his master Maurice a noble ideal of religion in the common life of humanity; the kingdom of God among men, the 'glory slowly growing on the shade'; the gradual destruction of the 'feud of rich and poor,' 'the want, the care, the sin, the faithless coldness of the times'; the gradual development of 'the valiant man and free, the larger heart the kindlier hand.'[2]

> How best to help the slender store,
> How mend the dwellings of the poor;
> How gain in life as life advances,
> Valour and Charity more and more.[3]

It was a high ideal of the religious life; perhaps the highest. Yet acknowledgment of this should not blind us to the greatness and the beauty of other no less sincere manifestations of the religious consciousness.

In the Middle Ages the sense of conscience, the dic-

[1] "The Passing of Arthur." [2] "In Memoriam," cvi.
[3] "To Rev. F. D. Maurice."

tates of morality, were but dimly developed; and men did deeds that 'earth should blush to look upon' without any great display of public condemnation. But over all their higher or their baser lives brooded the haunting realisation of the presence of God. Those who do not apprehend this fact can never appreciate in all its contrasts the strange life of that time. It is manifested in the great Cathedrals, built to God; in the mystic religion, craving for union with God; in the whole elaborate system of ritual and ceremony and Church organisation, designed to impress the worshippers with the certainty of God's presence here, and to prepare them for His presence beyond the grave.

And it is Tennyson's inability to comprehend this as the characteristic feature of the Middle Ages which causes the comparative failure of 'The Idylls of the King.' He takes the scenery of the mediæval age, forest and abbey and castle crowned hills; he adopts the outward form, the city of Camelot, the narrow streets and winding lanes, with the hall of Merlin, and its great rose windows, high above the old Gothic roofs of the town; he fills his canvas with the outward show, jousts, tourneyings, knights riding forth in armour to redress human wrongs, enchanters and heathen robbers lurking in the surrounding forests. But into this scenery, he places men filled with the ideals of six centuries later. The characteristic of modern development is to emphasise the morality of religion, and to minimise the spiritual elements. The characteristic of the Middle Ages was to emphasise the spiritual and make light of the morality. Arthur's ideal—

> To reverence the King, as if he were
> Thy conscience, and thy conscience as thy King

—would be strange to the ideals of Chivalry. Their morality when present was more outward performance

than dictated by conscience; fierce impulse, uncontrollable passion, mingling to cause deeds of the noblest and deeds of the basest; but, whether noble or base, whether revealed or secret, all performed under the searching eye of God.

And secondly, Tennyson failed to appreciate spiritual and ascetic religion because of his inability everywhere to discern the glory of effort after ideals from their nature unattainable. The ideal, he says in effect, may be the highest; but we 'who want the warmth of double life' cannot attain to it; therefore it is better that we should not try. Because we cannot all be Galahads and Percivales, it is better that we should not endeavour vainly to emulate their lives. This may be wisdom, the wisdom of the world; it is not the teaching of a religion, whose lesson is that heavenly success is attainable only through earthly defeat, and whose founder in His life exhibited apparently the most tremendous failure of all time. Here, at least, the ideal must be the highest; and so long as this is strenuously maintained, so long as the Quest of the Holy Grail is continued, even if the vision is never seen, and the 'old order' breaks up and the 'whole round table is dissolved,' yet in the maintenance of the Quest itself the Eternal triumph is assured. In these matters as in others, as in his criticism of attempts at reorganisation of society, Tennyson is too apt to judge by the immediate and obvious result. And because in the 'silent life,' and the mortification of the flesh induced by asceticism, there seems no manifest redressal of human wrong, and no direct effect on the happiness or the progress of the surrounding people, he would condemn these as vain outbreaks of exaggerated devotion, based on an unreal conception of the Deity. There may be another side to this question, some truth in the old theory that the voluntary sacrifices of the individual contribute to lighten

the whole dead mass of human suffering and human pain. This view has been maintained through many generations, the motive power of much of that grotesque and exaggerated asceticism that Tennyson condemns. Considering the wide sweep of time, and the little that is really known concerning the spiritual world, it is well not to judge hastily an ideal because immediate success seems lacking. Voluntary suffering may be as necessary now for the continued healthfulness of the Christian Church as it appeared necessary eighteen centuries ago; and no form of spiritual religion, if the motive be pure and the aims high and sincere, should be condemned because the immediate effect is not manifest in the direct and conspicuous increase in the sum-total of human happiness. Vicarious endurance, in some mysterious manner appears to be a law of human life; not until the 'serene result of all' is manifested can we venture to denounce any form of self-mortification, any kind of self-sacrifice, however repugnant in these times such forms may be to our softer and ease-loving nature.

XII. SOCIAL RELIGION

IN considering the application of Tennyson's more general principles to the particular political and social problems of his time, we must note a certain timidity or refusal to accept in a concrete form the results of his bolder theoretical generalisations. Tennyson, indeed, so extraordinarily sensitive to the outward impression of external things, could not consistently maintain any one general rule as universally applicable to the actual world of his experience. The conservative elements of his own nature, the influences of his education, and more than all, a certain shrinking from everything that was extravagant, harsh, and uncouth, and an instinctive distrust of the unknown, kept him, on the whole, in opposition to the more daring and heroic movements towards social reconstruction and the realisation of ideals in action, and caused him to be usually found in opposition to those who, nothing doubting, ventured forward into the untried future.

His guiding principle in theoretical judgments, as we have seen, was the acceptance of change as good; and, in the case of the individual self, he advocated this in its fullest interpretation, acknowledging that all our beliefs must be modified in accordance with this position; that action, not rest, continually pressing forward, not 'continuing in one stay,' must be the ideal of the highest good of the personality. But in the application of this principle to the world around him, and the organised system of society, he shrank from its full logical conclusions. He lived in a time of ferment and disorder; he saw change, as he held, leading to irretrievable destruction;

he saw reckless leaping into the dark without the counting of the inevitable result; he saw high ideals and generous faith terminating in hopeless ruin. And, in consequence, he was filled with doubt and perplexity, his principles urging him forward, his disposition leading him to cry back; and, although willing to acknowledge that progress is real in this world, and, as real, desirable, the working out of a Divine plan, yet at the actual workings of progress, as he saw one thing after another that he loved submerged in the universal flood, he was filled with dismay and despair. And so he was found generally in opposition to these social creeds of his time which were so ardently proclaimed as the application of religious creeds; 'the golden Age' became to him a vision ever receding into a remoter future; in the present he could often discern little but 'clouds and darkness, and the light darkened in the heavens thereof.'

And this tendency towards mistrust was due to the fundamentally conservative nature of his mind, to his love of law and order, and to a kind of constitutional timidity in embarking on unknown realms of speculation and of practical change. Tennyson shrank from the rugged, the rough, the strenuous, the untamed; his spirit was always more in sympathy with Classical than with Romantic Art; even in his verse, the one permanent characteristic is smoothness and grace. The uncouth and grotesque, in all its forms, filled him with repulsion. The high, impossible things of life, the great ventures, the staking of everything upon one chance, the bold casting away of the lower life through faith in the ability to attain the higher, all the forlorn hopes of thought and action received from him no enthusiastic praise. The fervent idealist, the thinker who drives his creed to its logical conclusion, the speculator who is 'for ever voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone,' the

ascetic who would sacrifice now that he may gain 'for ever,' the social teacher who would press boldly forward, through change apparently harmful, in the hope of attaining good beyond the change: these Tennyson regarded with distrust. The ideal ingrained in his very nature was order; disorder he regarded as the one hopeless condition of existence. It was the absence of this ideal in the world around him, the apparent feverish disorder of society and of belief, that filled him with much of his sadness. He could never gladly acquiesce in the violation of law for the possibility of the attainment of some higher end.

Tennyson, in fact, in his treatment of contemporary life around him, directly opposes the principle of Evolution, which, in theory, he had accepted. In religious speculation, and in practical affairs, he never did actually launch out into the deep. He always was one of those who hugged the shore, ever directing the prow of his ship towards the illimitable ocean, but ever again seeking shelter under the shadow of the land. Once, indeed, he almost gave up his settled position, and resolved to boldly sail forth into the unknown; whatever the cost, to ascertain

> If any golden harbour be for man
> In seas of Death and sunless gulfs of Doubt.[1]

It was the death of his friend that had determined him to undertake this voyage; and it was under the influence of this resolution that he wrote that poem in which he asserts his purpose

> To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
> Of all the Western stars, until I die.[2]

[1] "Sonnet to the Nineteenth Century" [2] "Ulysses."

But the mood in which he composed 'Ulysses' did not long continue. The

> Yearning in desire,
> To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
> Beyond the utmost bounds of human thought,[1]

and the resolve to encounter with a 'frolic welcome' the 'thunder and the sunshine' yielded before his constitutional dread of the unknown. It might be, he seems to have reasoned, if they ventured on this voyage, that they would 'touch the happy isles,' and 'see the great Achilles' whom they knew; but how great the chances, on the other hand, that they would be driven on sunken rocks, or founder in the deep seas, or be engulfed by alien shores.

Tennyson never left the sheltered water by the land. He always clung to the older traditions, the older faiths, the established order in politics and society. 'The calling of strange places,' 'in desire of many marvels oversea,' the impulse to cut moorings and in faith commit one's self to the deep, preferring even bold failure to timid success: these he strenuously resisted. And, although he gained much by this, and escaped the shipwreck and the total destruction which overwhelmed many of his contemporaries, his influence as a religious teacher was weakened by the refusal. For the most trustworthy guides are those who have essayed the great journey, and can tell, from direct experience, of its dangers; who have 'touched the happy isles,' and can bring news of their real existence; who, having 'proved all things,' have yet been able to 'hold fast that which is good.' In thought and in action the bold way is still the better way; and, in order to attain to something greater than commonplace success, it is

[1] "Ulysses."

necessary continually to 'speak unto the people that they go forward.' The good in evil, the glory of high enterprise, the ultimate justification of those who venture all things, who throw themselves against the current of the age, who dash themselves to pieces against the rocks of prejudice, who perish that those coming after may attain the promised land, these have been sung by others, but not by Tennyson. 'The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard' never received approval in his poetry. Rather it is his function to exhibit the beauty of quiet, orderly life; 'the small experiences of every day, concerns of the particular hearth and home'; to disclose, 'not by the comet's rush but the rose's birth' the reality of goodness; to be content, like his patient old monk Ambrosius, 'to see the yew-tree smoke, spring after spring for half a hundred years,' and learn half-fearfully from those who have returned from the Great Quest and still bear the marks of the struggle, the story of those who have succeeded and of those who have failed.

Yet those who have ventured have pronounced themselves not unrewarded. Those who have seen the vision of the Holy Grail must relinquish all their happy companionships, and the old pleasant life, and pass out into the forest and the desert to follow the Fairest wherever it may lead them. Those who hurl themselves against the social order around them, misunderstood by all, hated alike by the evil and by the good, dangerous enemies to society, have yet perchance chosen the better way. 'A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?'

> He ventured neck or nothing—heaven's success
> Found, or earth failure.
>
> . . . . . .

That low man seeks a little thing to do,
Sees it and does it:
This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
Dies ere he knows it.
That low man goes on adding one to one,
His hundred's soon hit:
This high man, aiming at a million,
Misses an unit.
That, has the world here—should he need the next,
Let the world mind him!
This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed
Seeking shall find him.[1]

It was the safe rather than the heroic course that Tennyson exalted in the world of thought and of action. In his own speculation he never launched out on the turmoil of modern doubt. He was always crushing his doubts, refusing to let them shake his belief in the older ideal. 'In Memoriam' is a record of doubts 'of *sorrow* born,' driven relentlessly home to him by the pressure of his loss, externally imposed, which he was compelled to meet and fight. Here is struggle against sorrow in its overwhelming force, not the voluntary intellectual voyaging in strange seas. Sorrow he would have come live with him, 'No casual mistress but a wife'; but the undesirable following brought in her train he energetically combats; never for a moment permitting himself to lose grasp of the older beliefs, never passing through a time of actual denial of faith. Neither in the world of thought nor in the world of action would Tennyson advocate any step without clearly seeing whither it might lead him.

And the consequence of all this is, that for the more adventurous minds Tennyson, as a teacher, can never give that full satisfaction which they can derive from

[1] Robert Browning: "A Grammarian's Funeral."

those who have journeyed freely, and gone forward wherever they may be led. He is too much prepared to judge success and failure by the mere worldly standard; he cannot see that 'earth's failure' may be necessary for 'heaven's success,' and that it is better to have failed in a great cause than to have contentedly acquiesced in a lower ideal. It is well to remember the lesson insisted on by a great contemporary writer. "While in all things that we see or do we are to desire perfection, and to strive for it, we are, nevertheless, not to set the meaner thing, in its narrow accomplishment, above the noble thing, in its mighty progress; not to esteem smooth minuteness above shattered majesty; not to prefer mean victory to honourable defeat, not to lower the level of our aim, that we may surely enjoy the complacency of success." [1]

Nowhere is this warning more necessary than in the treatment by Tennyson of the social philosophies of his time. The new outburst of devotion to Liberty, the preaching of the Gospel of the People, the pathetic clinging to heroic ideals despite their proved incapacity to realise themselves in action, have furnished for many men in this century a religion to which they have gladly devoted their lives.

The most melancholy, yet in a sense most glorious example of this, is furnished by the history of modern France. In a very real sense France has been sacrificed that Europe might be free. The ideals of the Revolution, preached with heroic earnestness, accepted with child-like faith, resulted only in an inundation of cruelty and corruption. Following an unattainable ideal, the nation has gone forward, never satisfied, striving after she knows not what, seeking principles of Liberty and Fraternity, which, from their very nature, she has found

[1] Ruskin: "Stones of Venice."

herself unable to realise in the 'troubled world of men.' And yet, from the steadfast adherence to this higher ideal, although she has yielded her people as the prey to false teachers, and driven them astray into almost hopeless anarchy, she has yet shown a lesson to the whole world, from which every country has benefited except her own. Such a history affords, in the highest degree, the spectacle of a tragedy to purge the onlookers with terror and pity. This is Tennyson's method of viewing it :—

> But yonder, whiff! there comes a sudden heat,
> The gravest citizen seems to lose his head,
> The king is scared, the soldier will not fight,
> The little boys begin to shoot and stab,
> A kingdom topples over with a shriek
> Like an old woman, and down rolls the world
> In mock heroics stranger than our own ;
> Revolts, republics, revolutions, most
> No graver than a schoolboys' barring out :
> Too comic for the solemn things they are,
> Too solemn for the comic touches in them,
> . . . . . .
> God bless the narrow seas !
> I wish they were a whole Atlantic broad.[1]

Here is Tennyson at his worst: insular pride, British Pharisaism, his natural timidity of spirit, and his worship of mere tangible success, all combined into an unlovely sneer at a nation which had essayed the nobler ideal, and, in failing, missed the attainment of the lower. The heroic conception of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, the lives freely devoted towards its attainment, the tragedy of the failure of the religion of humanity when forced into conflict with the hard realities of life, and, throughout all, the child-like earnestness of purpose and faith in human nature, which is so manifest in the history of Revolutions

[1] "The Princess," Conclusion.

and upheavals of society during the past century: these are worthy of treatment very different from this contented self-complacency and pious thanks that we are not as they are, which so often disfigures the pages of Tennyson's poetry.

Partly, indeed, Tennyson was narrow because he was national. At a time when there was little consciousness of Empire or Imperial Mission amongst the ruling classes of England, he was proclaiming the greatness of her heritage, and the duties of her power. When the Manchester School contested alone the dull ideals of the country classes, he had thrown scorn upon the conception of a

> Third-rate isle half lost among her seas,

and had proclaimed to those who regarded his words but as idle dreams the divine mission of the English race.

> The loyal to their crown
> Are loyal to their own fair sons, who love
> Our ocean-empire with her boundless homes
> For ever-broadening England, and her throne
> In our vast Orient, and one isle, one isle
> That knows not her own greatness.[1]

And this Imperial view of the mission of the English race was not, like so much of modern Imperialism, mere vulgar pride in power, or desire for increased wealth through extended commerce. Tennyson's faith in his countrymen was essentially part of his religion; it is as 'God's Englishmen,' as Milton called them, that he welcomes their acceptance of the burden of empire; and it is as guided by God to do His work that he possesses faith in the future of his nation. All through his historical plays, he is tracing out the history of their development, especially at great crises, the struggle to throw off foreign supremacy, to realise their own national existence. And in his

[1] Epilogue, "Idylls of the King."

modern poems he appeals to God for help in somewhat the same spirit as that shown by the Hebrew prophets. 'God as a man of war' is called in to aid the forces of His people in the ordeal of battle. England's wars, to Tennyson, are religious crusades; and His people are doing His work in wreaking 'God's just wrath on a giant liar.' Such a faith, associated with such a criminal blunder as the Crimean War, appears half laughable, half pathetic; but at the time it was very real to the poet, and very real to the people. So, at the end of his life he will still appeal to God to guide His people 'through the troublous years to come.'

> Are there thunders moaning in the distance?
> Are there spectres moving in the darkness?
> Trust the Hand of Light will lead her people,
> Till the thunders pass, the spectres vanish,
> And the light is victor, and the darkness
> Dawns into the jubilee of ages.[1]

This national faith helped to make Tennyson minimise the faults of his own race, and exaggerate the deficiencies of others. 'The great, broad-shouldered, genial Englishman' is his loved ideal; limited in ideas, filled with no nonsense about freedom or equality, honest and truthful, sensitive to human suffering, willing out of his superfluity to help the poor. All through the time that Tennyson wrote, a bitter and fierce conflict was being waged by a few writers against the appalling suffering and waste produced by an evil ideal of social organisation. One after another, almost all the great literary figures of the century in England were found abandoning their own particular work in order to participate in this new crusade. Carlyle, from philosophy and history, passed to assail the ideals of a people that 'had forgotten God'; Ruskin abandoned art criticism to denounce 'a nation

[1] "Jubilee Ode."

that has done iniquity by proclamation.' Kingsley and the 'men of '48,' William Morris and his followers denouncing the comfortable creed of wealth, the poets who assailed the unjust system upon which England's commercial greatness was being founded; all these were struggling with 'the working creed, the comfortable scheme of all society, the sanction of property as then constituted, and the justification of life as then lived.' And all these consequently spent the greater part of their lives fiercely assailed, hated and vilified by the great mass of their fellow-countrymen. Tennyson was not of them; not one of those whose struggles towards the new age will stand out in the future brightest among the dark shadows of the nineteenth century. While they were proclaiming the essential wrongfulness of society, he was singing of the advance of Science, the dawning of the golden age, the greatness of his people and of the land

> That freemen till,
> That sober suited Freedom chose,
> The land where girt with friends or foes,
> A man may speak the thing he will.[1]

And this subject was found more congenial to the people than the unpleasant truths enforced by his contemporaries; he attained a more rapid popularity, encountered less strenuous opposition. His interests were all with those in possession, not with those coming into power. In much of this struggle after 'the day of better things,' he could discern little but 'the yells and counter-yells of feud and faction,'

> With thousand shocks that come and go
> With agonies and energies,
> With overthrowings and with cries,
> And undulations to and fro,[2]

[1] "In Memoriam." [2] *Ibid.*

most of which seemed to him unnecessary and unwise. It was not thinkers and leaders like Tennyson that saved England in the dark and cloudy days from something far worse than 'the mad fool fury of the Seine,' the certain approach of which observers confidently foretold sixty years ago.

Tennyson's ideals were all of the older time, gracious courtesy, chivalrous condescension, the old-time manners of court or country house; above all, with order as the one essential virtue, and disorder as the one unpardonable sin. He gazed out into the world around him, and saw disorder everywhere triumphant: uncertain guidance, conflict in Church and State, the revolt of the poor against the rich, the minor graces of life passing away; and he was filled with a sort of hopeless disgust at the prospect.

'Forward' rang the voices then, and of the many mine was one;
Let us hush the cry of 'Forward' till ten thousand years have gone.[1]

He would, indeed, have no objection to ordered, tempered freedom, 'slowly broadening down from precedent to precedent.' But freedom that is harsh and grating, and speaks in noisy and strident tones, involving the breaking up of the social organisation and all the misery of conflict—freedom that drags ugly shapes in its train—such freedom he cannot abide. He possessed, indeed, none of the old aristocratic contempt for the life and the actions of the poor. He upheld, with enthusiasm, Lady Godiva's action in taking off the tax from the citizens of Coventry. He had learnt, only too keenly, the modern feeling of sensibility, realised deeply all the misery and the vice of the world, and the ceaseless cry of pain. He lamented, with his hero in 'Maud,'

[1] "Sixty Years After."

some of the most outrageous iniquities of society—adulteration of food, overcrowding of the poor, and 'Timour-Mammon' 'grinning on a pile of children's bones.'[1] His remedy was the voluntary beneficence of the aristocratic order. He unsparingly condemned those of that class who will not help the people. But he had no sympathy with the newer ideals of these people themselves. And, seeing them blundering helplessly, and in their blundering destroying, half unconsciously, most of that which he held dear, he turned round and lashed them with fury. In his social poems, as results of the new social 'gospel all men's good,' he could see only vitriol madness, the maiming of cattle, the decay of reverence, wild assertions of equality, the growth of a new tyranny worse than the old; and, in consequence, he lavished unsparing invectives on the leaders—'blind leaders of the blind'—and gloomily prophesied ruin.

'Trim hedges, smooth lawns, butterflies, posies, and nightingales'—a quiet English scenery—is the scenery loved by Tennyson. This is peopled by contented peasants, who bow deferentially to their superiors, a society organised in a hierarchy culminating in the great house. Here dwell a select and cultured few, who discuss mild philosophy, profess a languid enthusiasm for slowly broadening freedom, and, in moments of leisure, thank God for the existence of the narrow seas that protect them from 'the mad fool fury of the Seine.' Such was Tennyson's ideal of the perfect life. And it was because he lived to see the gradual destruction of this order, and seemed powerless to restrain the incoming tide, that in his latter years his voice so often rose in a melancholy cry of despair. His ideal was benevolence descending, halo-crowned, from above, received with enthusiastic

[1] "Maud," Part i.

gratitude by those below. 'Why,' he asked, as if suddenly discovering some marvellous act of kindness,

> Why should not these great Sirs
> Give up their parks some dozen times a year
> To let the people breathe?[1]

He lived, alas! to see 'the people' claiming as their own right that which was to be granted as a gracious favour; the hedges broken down, the motley crowd flooding in on to the pleasant preserves; strange shapes, socialists, democrats, anarchists, each preaching some new creed, which was to create the new heavens and the new earth; the downfall of the older ideal; the stormful birth of the new era. Small wonder, if he turned away in disgust from

> This earth a stage so gloomed with woe
> You all but sicken at the shifting scenes?[2]

if he cried passionately for the hushing of the idea of forward; if he could even find a sort of grim consolation in the thought which once had appeared so terrible:—

> What is it all but the trouble of ants, in the
> gleam of a million million of suns.[3]

[1] "The Princess," Conclusion.
[2] "The Play."
[3] "Vastness."

XIII. CHRISTIANITY

THE relation of Tennyson's religious teaching to the accepted theology of Christianity has been a subject of somewhat acrimonious discussion. The passages in his poetry in which this theology, or any portion of it, is explicitly treated, are for the most part scattered and uncertain; often put in the mouths of his characters, and not necessarily endorsed by himself. Hence, while many deny any distinctively Christian elements in his work, and find there only a vague and rather misty Theism, combined with admiration for the historical figure of Jesus and for the morality taught by Him, others maintain that the definite assertion of all the essential verities of the Christian faith is conspicuous throughout his poetry.

The facts seem to lie between these two extreme views. Tennyson's own personal religion we are not at present discussing; within such a short time of his death an inquiry concerning this would be both fruitless and impertinent. It is the faith manifested in his poetry, his teaching as it appears to those who only know him through the medium of his published work, that forms the subject of our consideration. And in this we seem to discover a certain variation in the strength of his belief in the different dogmas of the Christian creeds. Some of these he firmly maintains as an essential part of his faith, and is never weary of emphasising. Others he maintains, but with a grasp less firm and a faith less sure; others, again, he never seems clearly to advocate or even adequately to comprehend.

On the whole, however, we shall find that Tennyson adopts infinitely more than he rejects in the current

conceptions of Christianity; and that many of its doctrines he only failed to emphasise because of the somewhat inchoate shape which they took in his mind, owing to his habitual distrust of all dogma. We are not stretching words beyond their just meaning when we class him amongst the defenders of the faith which has been so fiercely assailed throughout the greater part of the century.

First, then, there can be little doubt of his admiration for the ethical teaching of Christianity, and of his love for the Christian ideal of life as exemplified in its greatest exponents, and especially in the person of its Founder. It represents for him the highest organised system of morality which the world has ever seen; and although he would reject the dogmatic teaching of a theology, he would accept the practical application of a moral code of law. Emphatically advocating both any system of law and order above any manifestation of lawlessness, and the older system as established, against the uncertainties of a newer still untried, he was drawn by all his instinctive impulses into a defence of the accepted system of morals. The child of a country parsonage, educated in the sheltered atmosphere of a Christian home, all his tenderest associations gathered round the Christian ideal of life; and it is the fulfilment of this ideal in real and imaginary persons, without undue exaggeration of any of its principles, which receives his sincerest admiration.

Consequently, we never find in his poetry glorification of those who have violated the established ethical code; never even any indication that, under any circumstances, such a course could be justified. The difficulties of the individual confronted with some intricate problem of life, and unable to conceive which is the right course to pursue; the violation of the orthodox rules of conduct in order to conform to some higher law; the exhibiting of

the unreal character of so much of our current proverbial philosophy, and its incapacity to furnish a sure guide for action in the great crises of life—all those problems of moral casuistry and doubtful choice in which his great contemporary delighted, find no echo in the poetry of Tennyson. The duty is there, clear and plain, before each one; he may choose the evil, he may oppose the good; but of which is evil and which is good there is no doubt whatever.

So that, as a system of practical ethics, the moral law which was promulgated in Palestine two thousand years ago, and has been tested by the experience of the Christian Church through numberless generations, remains for Tennyson the valid system, to which he holds it our duty to bestow our allegiance. Chivalry towards the weak and helpless, a high standard of personal honour, active combat with evil, the love for one woman only, the assertion of the sanctity of marriage, the desire for fame in noble deeds, forgiveness of injuries, love and charity with all men: these form the elements which make up Tennyson's ideal man; and all are distinctive, many are characteristic, of the Christian teaching. He has depicted in Arthur, 'the flower of Christian Chivalry,' his ideal character, with all its excellences and all its limitations; and he has traced the strength of such a character directly to the free acceptance of the Christian ideal of life.

> The King will follow Christ, and we the King
> In whom high God hath breathed a secret thing.

And although humility may be partly concealed in the pride of high honour, and consciousness of perfection produce a somewhat painful intolerance for human frailty, and the desire for fame may not be so characteristic a Christian virtue as the desire to serve, and the assertion

of the self be almost too insistent, yet few can doubt that on the whole the ideal is a noble ideal, and conformable with the ideal of Christian manhood in one of its highest and most unique developments.

But here, and in all his consideration of the Christian teaching, Tennyson exhibits a reluctance to develop or represent its sterner and darker elements. The danger of his system is the tendency to water down morality into a mild sentiment of love and charity, and a glorified principle of universal comfort. 'He's a good fellow and 'twill all be well' is the feeling ultimately produced by the further development of this creed—a sentiment, which, however attractive and pleasing, is utterly irreconcilable with the facts of life. And moralists contemplating the condition of the world as it is, are unable to banish evil in this light-hearted manner, and to resolve everything into a widespread good-tempered tolerance. God, if existing, is something more than a philanthropist; and other ends appear to be sought in the world than the immediate happiness of man. Christianity appeals to deeper feelings in the human heart than the simple desire that everything should be pleasantly smoothed over. It accepts as one of its first principles the existence of evil as something real, with a strange, uncertain life of its own, flourishing not only as disorder outside, but also as a corroding disease, present within the souls of men. Jesus came not simply to compel men to admire His life and to follow His example. He furnished a test also, drawing towards himself those who accepted Him, but producing in those who rejected Him a repulsion which drove them into worse condition than any they would have experienced if He had never come. His fan was in His hand; and although in the separation effected by His call He will 'gather the wheat into His garner'; yet 'the chaff he will burn

with unquenchable fire.' There is much in this world, as manifested to us, to yield us hope of the ultimate triumph of goodness. But there is a darker side which it would be vain to ignore. Evil cannot be resolved into ignorance, nor into an unreality, the mere shadow of the good; it may be necessary for the development of the good, but yet as evil it is evil and cannot be identified with its opposite. Now, as of old time, sin brings punishment; and the misdeeds of the father are visited upon the children; and vicarious suffering, and apparent failure, and deliberate choice of darkness instead of light, are facts to which we cannot be blind. The sufferings of Christ 'to save His people from their sins' witness to the reality of those sins; the facts of the Atonement, however interpreted, attest at least to the tremendous significance of the force and the reality of evil. Christianity is something more than universal good-fellowship, and the Christian Church more than a mutual improvement society. The tendency to slur over and neglect the darker side of human character, and of the teachings of religion concerning it, was a tendency very prevalent in that age of cheery optimism and contented belief in Progress and the ultimate happiness of all, to which Tennyson in his earlier period belonged. But it is a tendency that cannot maintain itself for long against the whole teaching of human experience, and a tendency which invariably produces a reaction. The condemnation of ascetism as vain superstition, and of the harsher side of Christianity as that portion of its teaching which we have outgrown and can consequently neglect, leaves untouched one great phase of human life and human character, which any living religion must explain and satisfy.

But this direct consciousness of sin as something inside one's self to be fought and conquered at whatever cost of suffering, never seems to have entered into Tennyson's

experience. Lacking in him, it is lacking in all the characters of his creation. Only once does he pourtray this feeling—in 'St Simeon Stylites':—

> Pain heap'd ten hundredfold to this, were still
> Less burden, by ten hundredfold, to bear,
> Than were those lead-like tons of sin, that crush'd
> My spirit flat before thee.
> . . . . . .
> Have mercy, mercy; take away my sin.

And here it is only exhibited as an abnormal, unhealthy, almost grotesque development, mingled with spiritual pride and a querulous clamour for sainthood—a feeling little praiseworthy, and certainly an undesirable possession for the sane and healthy individual. And yet the reality of sin and the intense conviction of this reality have been experienced by men of all ages, and are the feelings of the human heart to which Christianity directly appeals. 'If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.' These mysterious words of Christ seem to point to some reality in this evil, to be fought and destroyed even at the cost of maimed life and physical pain. And the passionate cry of the Apostle, 'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death,' is not the solitary outburst of a gloomy fanatic; but a cry that has been re-echoed through all ages, and far beyond the limits of Christian history.

> Video meliora proboque,
> Deteriora sequor

is the experience of the Roman poet. Sin, and the loathing of self produced by sin, and the need of deliverance from this by the interposition of a higher power, are the facts which Christianity encounters, and the need which it

satisfies. And no system which does not realise this fact can ever apprehend in its entirety the Christian system of morality or the Christian philosophy of life.

But, as we have already pointed out, Tennyson never reveals this consciousness in his teaching or in his characters. Other poets have manifested this feeling through the characters of their creation.

> Yea, what if dried-up stems wax red and green,
> Shall that thing be which is not nor has been?
> Yea, what if sapless bark wax green and white,
> Shall any good fruit grow upon my sin?[1]

None of Tennyson's characters ever utter such a human cry as this. In many of them aspiration after good, consciousness of greatness, the realisation of the beauty of holiness, even the sense of inexplicable failure and impotence, are all exhibited; but nowhere this unique realisation of sin as a taint of personality, and as a crime against God. Sin, as disorder, is depicted in the Idylls as destroying the goodly kingdom of Arthur; but its action is objective not subjective; as producing evil consequences, not as in reality and altogether evil; 'red ruin, and the breaking up of Laws,' rather than an insult on the Divine Stainlessness and Purity. Arthur himself is sublimely unconscious of any possible deficiencies in his own character; how far removed from the ideal of the Christian saint, always maintaining warfare against the powers of evil not only without but also within his own soul. No trace of the possibility of sinfulness in himself softens his last speech to Guinevere. Regarded as an allegory of 'sense at war with soul,' the tone may be justified; but certainly this is not the natural meaning of the poem; but rather the portrayal of an heroic, an ideal character. And no man, however perfect, has a

[1] Swinburne: "Laus Veneris."

right to address another human creature, however degraded, as Arthur addresses Guinevere in his farewell; no man possesses the right to forgive 'as Almighty God forgives.' And if this consciousness of imperfection is absent in Arthur, how much graver an absence does it become in Guinevere, when she at length fully realises the result of her action. Remorse for injury to Arthur, the thought that her name will live through the centuries as a name of scorn, the determination to live down the sin in her heart that she may be his mate hereafter in the heavens before God: these are the emotions she experiences. But the sense of sin as sin, as done in the sight of God, as something that must demand inevitable expiation, she never experiences; and the simple life she adopts at Alnesbury, living as a nun with the nuns, and her final selection for Abbess on account of her 'good deeds and pure life,' is a very different life from that in reality chosen by those to whom the consciousness has once come home of the impossibility of the restoration of a lost innocence, and the horror of an irrevocable past.

> A spotless child sleeps on the flowering moss—
> 'Tis well for him; but when a sinful man,
> Envying such slumbers, may desire to put
> His guilt away, shall he return at once
> To rest by lying there? Our sires knew well
> (Spite of the grave discoveries of their sons)
> The fitting course for such: dark cells, dim lamps,
> A stone floor one may writhe on like a worm:
> No mossy pillow blue with violets.[1]

Lancelot is the only one of Tennyson's leading characters who seems to possess, in any degree, this con-

[1] R. Browning: "Paracelsus."

sciousness—and that only for a time, and at the sight of the vision of the Holy Grail; and it is rather contempt of self than passionate hatred of sin that he possesses; it is a 'dying fire of madness in his eyes' which was chiefly manifest in his story; and apparently madness, which came upon him as of old and 'whipt him into waste fields far away,' was the motive cause of his self-hatred, rather than the apprehension of his own vileness. In fact, Tennyson was unable to depict in his characters an experience denied to himself. Only to some is this consciousness given; had he realised its tremendous forces he would have better comprehended the severer and sterner sides of the Christian morality.

This neglect to note the real conditions of human life, and this somewhat light-hearted treatment of the great problem of sin, threw Tennyson into fierce opposition to the doctrine, which was currently accepted in his day, of the eternal existence of evil, of the eternal punishment of sinfulness. Here is not, indeed, a definite conflict with the Christian teaching; for it is at least doubtful if the words of Christ and of His Church can be interpreted as asserting this dogma. But the emphatic manner in which the doctrine is repudiated, and the contempt exhibited for those still unable to deny it, are very conspicuous in the latter portion of Tennyson's writings; and the treatment of the whole subject is far from satisfactory. The man in 'Despair,' unwillingly rescued from death, denounces belief in eternal punishment; he 'broke away from Christ' because he seemed to speak 'of a Hell without hope without end'; and asserts that 'the God of love and the God of Hell together—that cannot be thought.' And although it would be unfair to insist on Tennyson's endorsement of all the utterances of his characters, yet the opinion

here somewhat crudely advanced seems to represent Tennyson's own mature conviction on the matter :—

Hell? If the souls of men were immortal, as men have been told,
The lecher would cleave to his lusts, and the miser would yearn for his gold ;
And so there were hell for ever ! But were there a God, as you say,
His love would have power over Hell till it utterly vanish'd away.[1]

And we find the same position asserted in his own conversations.

It is hardly necessary here to state the impossibility of disposing of the problem in such a cursory manner. The mere assertion that God as love is incompatible with Eternal suffering, or the ultimate existence of evil, does not solve anything; for it is as difficult to comprehend how a loving God can permit any suffering, which is certainly real and as certainly evil; or how a Perfect God can at any time tolerate sin. 'Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? Purer of eyes than to behold evil, and can'st not look upon iniquity?' This inquiry is as unanswerable now as of old. If the unconditioned volition of man be resolved into determined action, and the whole progress of the Universe into a process, fore-ordained in every detail, before the foundation of the world, then it is indeed possible to conceive that the ultimate end of this process may be individual perfection, and the final triumph of righteousness. But if, as Tennyson most emphatically asserts, the free choice of man must be accepted as real and not imaginary, it is difficult to see why it should be impossible for him always to choose the evil, rather than the good. To Tennyson the freedom of the Will is the ultimate fact of man's personality; upon it he bases his whole ethical

[1] "Despair."

system. And this is immortal; 'the living will that shall endure' when 'all that seems shall suffer shock.' Either, then, the personality remains with its power of choice, in which case it may always choose hell rather than heaven, or, as it may be better expressed, in which case heaven for it would be hell; or else it can only be made to choose good by the destruction of the individual power of choice, in which case the man as man ceases to exist, and the result is annihilation of personality, which to Tennyson is inconceivable. If the man himself, by his own volition, deliberately chooses evil as his good, if to him the higher pleasures are hateful, and selfish gratification the only possible happiness, it is difficult to conceive how even God's love can have power over such a one till Hell 'utterly vanish away.' To be consistent with the facts of life, the darker as well as the lighter, we cannot thus definitely assert the impossibility of such a future. Tennyson's earlier attitude was more consistent with fact; the reliance on the strenuous faith and trust, without the dogmatic statement of what must be; trust that 'not one life will be destroyed when God has made the pile complete'; faith in the 'larger hope'; belief that ultimately, and in some way, and by methods that at present we can only imperfectly comprehend, 'love will conquer at the last' and 'God be all and in all.'

In its relation to Christian morality, then, we find Tennyson's teaching, on the whole, in agreement with it, although neglecting its sterner statements, and emphasising its gentler and benigner aspects. Of Christianity as a theology in its philosophical aspect, he also accepts the fundamental tenets, while failing fully to grasp the significance of certain of these propositions.

First, then, on the great question of immortality Tennyson but emphasises the Christian standpoint; and

to him the assertion of the survival beyond the grave is the vital principle of the faith. 'The cardinal point of Christianity,' he once wrote, 'is the life after death.' And here, indeed, he does but re-echo the language of the Apostle on the point. "If there be no Resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not raised; and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain and your faith is also vain . . . Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." [1] On this point, Christianity has never vacillated; and all attempts to reconstruct its teaching on a purely natural basis, and to banish 'other worldliness' from its theology, have signally failed. Tennyson did not, indeed, derive his faith in immortality from Christian evidence; rather he accepted Christianity because it taught the doctrine of Immortality, a belief which he held to be vital to the continued existence of all that is best in mankind. And, however much the teaching as to the conditions of the future life has required modifications in different ages and under altered conditions of knowledge, the continued existence of the individual, the viewing of this life as essentially a probation or trial for another, the judging of the temporal by the Eternal, has always been enforced by Christianity. With this belief it stands or falls. The other-worldliness, denounced as harmful by enthusiasts who desired that all the energies of men should be devoted to the advance of material comfort, is now almost universally acknowledged to be a necessity of all religious faiths. The natural world, as such, cannot satisfy the human spirit; and everything in it only possesses significance and worth as symbolic of the Eternal Realities behind, pointing to a fuller realisation in a life beyond

[1] 1 Cor. xv.

death. Here, at length, modern thought has come round to Tennyson's standpoint; and the alternatives are clearly recognised—either the possibility of a future existence or the abandonment of positive religious belief.

The second great doctrine of the Christian faith, which Tennyson entirely accepts, is the doctrine of God as Love. The tremendous claim here involved, the recognition of the Soul of the Universe, who controlleth the sea and moveth the storm and telleth the number of the stars as being essentially *Love*, is peculiar to Christianity. Love is God; in human love we are realising God, most fully manifesting the Ultimate Reality. This, for Tennyson, is the highest revelation of the nature of God which has been given to the world; it was the revelation of Christ. "When ye pray say '*Our Father.*'" God is not only infinite power; not only exalted in righteousness, approving of good, hating evil. God is Love, all-powerful, yet all-merciful; infinitely pitiful, willing that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the Truth. 'The All great is the All loving too.' In loving we come nearest to God. This was the message of Christ to men, which alone provided fresh power to combat the growing sense of the evils of life, and to give to humanity the strength to struggle forward towards its Maker and God.

There have been times when the faith has burnt dim, and when, confronted with the physical vastness and the apparent indifference of Nature, men have deemed belief in a God of Love impossible to maintain. But such belief has been the consistent teaching of that Christianity which has endured through the confused turmoil of eighteen disordered centuries—the gospel of good news brought by Christ; and it is the faith which, to others, as to Tennyson, alone can render tolerable existence in this unintelligible world.

And from God as Love, willing that none shall perish, and from the Immortality of the Soul postulated as the fundamental tenet of His religion, Tennyson could steadfastly assert the possibility of communion with the Spiritual World, and the efficiency of prayer for spiritual help and guidance. Nowhere, indeed, do we find in his poetry any apprehension of the possibility of effecting change in the material order, by prayer; God might be the God who ruled the tempest and controlled the sea; but his purposes were so vast, and so little comprehensible, that it appeared impossible that he should alter these universally apprehended realities, for the satisfaction of an individual soul. The great world passed on its way, guided by law. Tennyson's sense of order was too great to allow of the possibility of the violation of this law at the demand of personal desire. 'O Thou Infinite, Amen!'[1] was his prayer in contemplating the change and progress of material things. The operation of prayer, the source from which health could be drawn, was in the inmost 'deeps of personality'; in that Will which seemed to him the essential reality of individual consciousness. Here aid could be obtained when needed, and here succour was given to those who asked it of 'Immortal Love.'

> Evermore,
> Prayer from a living source within the will,
> And beating up through all the bitter world,
> Like fountains of sweet water in the sea,
> Kept him a living soul.[2]

And here, also, in those unfathomed depths, where the high resolves and irrecoverable decisions are made which

[1] See "Life," vol. i.
[2] "Enoch Arden."

cause the great revolutions of the soul, mysterious Powers, visitants from the Eternal world, are found working upon the human Spirit.

> Nay, there may be those about us whom we neither see nor name,
> Felt within us as ourselves, the Powers of Good, the Powers of Ill,
> Strowing balm, or shedding poison in the fountains of the Will.[1]

And it is in this uncertain region which we now but dimly comprehend, that 'the Powers that tend the Soul, to help it from the death that cannot die' can exert their influence; it is the 'abysmal deeps of Personality' in which God acts upon the individual.

> Lest she should fail and perish utterly,
> God, before whom ever lie bare
> The abysmal deeps of Personality,
> Plagued her with sore despair.[2]

'The reason why men find it hard to regard prayer in the same light in which it was formerly regarded,' he said, 'is that we seem to know more of the unchangeableness of Law; but I believe that God reveals Himself in each individual soul. Prayer is, to take a mundane simile, like opening a sluice between the great ocean and our little channels, when the great sea gathers itself together and flows in at full tide.'[3]

The third tenet of the Christian faith which Tennyson accepted, although not with the living conviction of the first two, was the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ. He shrank, indeed, from all forms of dogmatism, and refused to assert anything as to the nature of the Incarnation, and the self-limitation of the Deity. But he accepted the fact without attempting to define it. 'I

[1] "Sixty Years After." [2] "The Palace of Art."
[3] "Life," vol. i. p. 324.

am not very fond of creeds,' he wrote; 'it is enough for me that I know God Himself came down from Heaven in the likeness of men.'

But it was the loveliness of His earthly life and the superlative excellence of His moral teaching, rather than any manifestation of 'signs and wonders,' which yielded for Tennyson evidence of His Divinity. The Eternal God could only be revealed in the forms of flesh as suffering with His people, and symbolising by the Highest life known to us here the realities of the spiritual world. The most strenuous moral creed, the noblest ethical life, must be interpreted as in a unique sense Divine. Christ in His person is therefore most truly God, Reality in its highest perfection, its ultimate development — a fact which we symbolise under the title, 'Son of God.' But in so far as we fulfil the law of love, so do we become a part of this Divinity. We are partakers of the life of Christ, realising Christ in ourselves; at length, with the complete attainment of the highest life, we can say with the Apostle, 'Not I, but Christ liveth in me,'—'The Christ that is to be.'

But the tremendous import of this fact in its far-reaching results he never clearly grasped; and the allusions to it in his poems are but slight and scattered. He was indeed fascinated by the sublimity of the character of Jesus, and recognised in His life the proof of His Divine nature. He acknowledged that

> The Word had breath, and wrought
> With human hands the creed of creeds
> In loveliness of perfect deeds,
> More strong than all poetic thought.[1]

But the doctrine of the Incarnation never took for him the great central position as the one supreme fact of

[1] "In Memoriam," xxxvi.

history, beside which all else fades into insignificance. And consequently there was a certain tendency for it to disappear from his teaching; so that they are not altogether wrong who maintain that a vague Theism is the only positive creed deducible from his later writings. Tennyson never fully appreciated, as Browning or his own master Maurice appreciated, the absolute necessity for the Incarnation to satisfy the *needs* of men. He looked for the ideal man in man and never found the Christ; Browning and Maurice took the real man as he is, and derived from him the need of a Christ.

> I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ
> Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
> All questions in this world and out of it,[1]

says Browning; and to those who adopt this position the fundamental fact of Christianity is at once the consummation of all previous development, the central fact of progress, the starting-point of a new epoch in the history of mankind. The 'Desire of all nations' had come, the Light of the world, illuminating the past, revealing as by sudden insight much that had appeared dark and obscure. And Tennyson never apprehended how completely harmonious was this event with his philosophy of evolution, as another step forward in the development of the Spirit, and the progress of all things towards unity in God. At intervals in the upward development of the world, new life had come into the world; a fresh start had been accomplished; from dull matter to physical life, from unconscious development into full consciousness, the process was never retrograde, ever forward. But for these sudden advances, evolution would have ceased, and degeneration succeeded. And here once more was a

[1] Browning: "A Death in the Desert."

forward step, an advance just at the time when progress seemed turning back upon itself, and the highest civilisation falling into decay. Life, new life, had come into the world; all previous religions, attempts to seek after God, blind gropings and dim adumbrations of the coming light, found their goal in this fact:—'the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth.' God as man elevated humanity from its own self-contempt, revealed possibilities yet undreamt of; philosophies found here the highest needs of mankind satisfied; new purpose came to mankind, energy for the long struggle, hope for the final victory.

And this doctrine of the Incarnation falling into its rightful position in the natural evolution of Spirit, requires the continued future presence of this life, flowing down from Christ, a new force in the world. And so, indeed, the philosophers of the Church had taught from earliest time; the Incarnation was not simply an historical fact satisfying the demands of men for the consecration of manhood; it was a fresh start, an introduction from the world beyond phenomena of a new form of energy. This faith Tennyson never seems to have comprehended or accepted. The example of Christ, the beauty of the morality taught by Christ, he gladly acknowledges; but he never seemed to realise that that life for which he yearned, the 'more life and fuller' that he desired, was just the desire satisfied by Him who introduced life to the world and asserted 'I am come that they might have *life*, and might have it more abundantly.' Tennyson could see no method of its attainment, but the energetic striving of the Will, unsupported from without; and he was forced to acknowledge sadly that this alone could guarantee no triumph over the lower impulses of men.

What keeps a spirit wholly true
To that ideal which he bears?
What record? not the sinless years
That breathed beneath the Syrian blue.[1]

And he rightly judges that neither the memory of a life receding through the centuries into an ever remoter past, nor the attraction of an ideal morality, however beautiful, can by themselves successfully encounter 'those tremendous forces — the passion and the pride of man.' But the Incarnation was not an event ceasing with the departure of Christ, not an appearance in time accompanied by signs and wonders, dying out with the termination of the ideal life. 'Behold I make all things new'; new life was flowing into the world, and has poured down through the centuries; and Christ was still present guiding His Church in the work of bringing all things into one. It was the foundation of a new order of existence, a commencement of something never before present, the building of that 'City of God,' for which men had sighed in vain.

And through his inability to see this, Tennyson never clearly comprehended the method by which might be affected that 'Restitution of all things' which he so passionately desired. Much of the pessimism of his later poems may be attributed to this fact. The principles which he had held to be working towards this end seemed to have failed him; and although he still clung to the belief in the 'one far-off event,' he was forced to throw it forward farther and farther into an ever remoter future. It remained an article of faith, of which the evidence seemed to be growing fainter. Progress had failed to extirpate the beast; moral advance seemed but slight from 'the passion of the primal clan'; knowledge had

[1] "In Memoriam," lii.

grown, but wisdom lingered; belief in the satisfaction of mankind by advancing science and material comfort, and the future happiness of all, became weakened towards the close of the century. The tokens of harmony grew less discernible; faith in humanity became clouded; the discord more manifest; the divine purpose harder to define.

So that while Tennyson still firmly maintained his belief in the end, the goal of the whole human race, his faith in the means by which it would be attained became fainter and more doubting. Natural progress, human effort, advance of knowledge, admiration for moral beauty, all these seemed to fail before the force of the selfish and dividing impulses of men. Yet could he have apprehended it, the work was being accomplished before his eyes, and the instrument provided in the Economy of God, guided by the life of His Spirit, visibly working towards the Restitution of all things. Christian philosophy acknowledges, as emphatically as the poet himself, the imperfection of man, and the reality and appalling power of sin in all its forms—'sins of will, defects of doubt, and taints of blood.' Christianity emphasises also the aspect of sin as the dividing, isolating, estranging principle, keeping men apart in selfish pursuit of their own satisfaction, destroying that unity which is the goal of all things. But Christianity can also point to a means by which this sin is overcome, by which the unity is gradually being attained. Chaos and trouble appear in the Universe as apprehended to us; the harmony in nature is hard to discern, and the purpose of God hidden. But the harmony is there, behind the outward show of things; the darkness is in ourselves. By the new life from Christ, through the Church the body of Christ, by the purifying of the individual members, and by the conformity of their will to the will

of God, the harmony was being made manifest, in a very real sense unity was being restored. Early in the history of Christianity this wonderful interpretation of the purpose of the Church had been advanced by its great teachers; in its darkest ages it had never been altogether forgotten. "The purpose of God had commenced in the Eternal Past to make Christ the summing into One of all things. The mystery of Christ was consummated on the Cross, by which Jew and Gentile passed into one man. Now, by the unity of the Spirit, a unity in variety and a unity ever growing, the body of Christ was moving towards maturity." "That in the dispensation of the fulness of the times," says the great Apostle, "He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in the heavens and which are on the earth."[1] So throughout the ages, by the patient working of the Divine Instrument, this restitution was being accomplished; imperfectly and incompletely here, but progressing always in the invisible Church 'behind the veil.' Hampered indeed by the weakness and unfaithfulness of its followers, often failing, often untrue to its ideal, yet never quite dead, the Christian Church continues through the centuries its world mission in the bringing into one the things which were divided and estranged; looking forward towards its goal, the final revelation of harmony, and the consummation of all things in God; "when we arrive, all of us together, to the perfect Man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ."

Tennyson looked towards the same consummation; his faith in the final triumph of love, in the 'Glory slowly growing on the shade,' in the making of Man, endured until the end. But his teaching leaves its ragged edges; it requires for completion the manifestation of the evidence

[1] Eph. i. 10.

of the working towards that end, even in the limited arena of human earthly life. With passionate hope he clung to the ideal of

> One God, one law, one element,
> And one far-off divine event,
> To which the whole creation moves.[1]

And in the fulness of the times, his hope would be justified. 'Though the vision tarry wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.' For, to the eye of faith, the work is being visibly accomplished, and the prayer of the Church, the Commonwealth of God, not remaining unanswered. "O God of unchangeable power and eternal light, look favourably on Thy whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; and, by the tranquil operation of Thy perpetual Providence, carry out the work of man's salvation; and let the whole world feel and see that things which were cast down are being raised up, and that which had grown old is being made new, and all things are returning to perfection through Him from Whom they took their origin, even through our Lord Jesus Christ."[2]

[1] "In Memoriam," Epilogue.

[2] Gelasian Collects, quoted in "Lux Mundi," v. p. 214.

XIV. TENNYSON AND HIS AGE

BEFORE attempting a summary of our examination of the position occupied by Tennyson as a religious teacher, it is necessary to consider briefly his relation to the conditions under which he wrote, and the ideals of the age in which he lived. Such a task presents almost insuperable difficulties; the tendencies and characteristics of an age can never be clearly discerned by those living almost under its shadow. It appears impossible from such a short distance, with such a limited perspective, to gain any clear notion of the general features of the marvellously complex thought of the nineteenth century. Never perhaps at any one time were so many different elements simultaneously presented: cross-currents, counter-streams, eddies, and whirlpools of thought, mingled and interacting in bewildering multiplicity. The leading thinkers scarcely knew whither they were tending, and repudiated the logical conclusions of their own position; others attempted to throw themselves directly against the popular stream, or drew apart gloomily prophesying ruin. Tennyson, with a poetical career commencing early and prolonged far beyond the customary period of mental activity, reflects in his work better perhaps than any other single writer the multiform tendencies of his age.

Throughout his poetry, however, we can recognise the influence of one general stream of thought, never perhaps universally accepted, but presenting a progress and a definite history which will perhaps be recognised by future historians as the characteristic movement of the time—a movement with which Tennyson came into direct relation all through its career, and by which the whole

tone of his work and teaching was deeply coloured. This movement, conspicuous in European as well as in English thought, was composed of several elements fused together; but in its most general scope it represented attempts to solve the problems of life by the application, in different spheres, of the method of empirical analysis of experience. Its first period, representing its triumphant rise, was almost identical with the second quarter of the century; a time of great intellectual fermentation, characterised by nothing so much as by an almost boundless optimism. This optimism was derived largely from the sudden consciousness of the possession of almost unlimited powers by the human intellect. Natural Science, Natural Religion and Democracy were its most clamorous watchwords. The discovery of means of controlling the great forces of nature for the service of Man, and the capacity of utilising these for the attainment of his desires, had raised immense hopes of the future comfort and greatness of humanity. 'The age of marvels' had returned to earth. Steam, electricity, power everywhere bountifully provided, were to be used by human wisdom for the removal of the suffering and the lightening of the toil of men. By the aid of the good fairy Science, the Golden Age was to return to the earth. All diseases were to vanish before increasing knowledge; everything that could beautify or amplify human existence was to be produced from the forces of nature by the ingenuity and skilfulness of the human intellect. Sorrow, pain, poverty, the old spectres that had so long haunted mankind, and driven men forward in continual strife with their fellows and with Nature around them, were to finally disappear. The good genii, it was fervently maintained, would be harnessed to the car of progress; under their painless guidance it would triumphantly roll forward into an ever happier future. Satisfied at length, and crammed with material

comfort, mankind would 'bask in a summer sky,' with their minds relieved for ever from the hard and sordid struggle for existence, delighting more especially in the pleasures of human intercourse, and in the composition of optimistic poetry.

And this belief in science was accompanied and assisted by an equally child-like faith in the advance of Progress, under the influence of human reason. Liberalism was the watchword of the new spirit. Freedom should slowly 'broaden down from precedent to precedent.' The artificial restraints which had produced so much of the suffering and sorrows of mankind, were to dissolve under the influence of airy generalisations concerning the brotherhood of man. The spread of commerce and trade would bind together all the peoples of the world in a firmer unity. Reason would exhibit to an acquiescent world the absolute irrationality of war. Under its benign influence the old futile disputes, the artificial barriers dividing men into nations, would vanish before advancing intelligence; Patriotism would be submerged in an enthusiasm for universal humanity.

And the third element in this three-fold instrument for the securing of universal happiness, was the action of the reason of man in the sphere of religion. Those chains and fetters which had formerly been imposed upon the 'holy spirit of man' by religious teachers utilising supernatural sanctions, would also disappear in this universal solvent. The terrors of a future world, luridly depicted by imaginative theologians, would no longer render unendurable the pleasures of the present. The long nightmare which had oppressed humanity, and driven men into wild excesses of asceticism and panic fear, would disappear with the coming of the day. Religion would be natural, kind, gentle, comfortable; all harshness and bitterness would be banished. The 'cramping creeds

that had maddened the peoples' would 'vanish at last'; exaggerated devotion, the atrophy of human powers produced by religious mania, would be altogether abolished. This new religion was to be universal; no longer would strife be stirred up concerning inexplicable dogmas, and unjustified assumptions; dissension or persecution on account of religion would crumble before ridicule and reason, and be relegated to a banished past. By a simple, joyous, universal, undogmatic creed, with a delight in the beauties of Nature, and in the healthy human instincts unchecked by artificial restraints, the religious impulses of the human race were to be permanently satisfied.

By the aid of this faith, then, in Universal Reason—reason in nature as natural knowledge, reason in politics as ordered progress, reason in religion as undogmatic belief—the new heavens and the new earth were to be speedily created. This spirit attained its consummation in England about the time of the Great Exhibition, when all its characteristics were clearly manifested. The display of marvellous scientific invention, the enthusiastic faith in progress, the universal conviction that through the advance of reason and trade war between civilised nations had been relegated to the past, the rejection of dogmatic creeds and the consideration of their adherents with a kind of contemptuous pity, all reached their height at about this time.

This ideal Tennyson presented in his earlier poetry; in his verse men found their own thoughts reflected; and through this presentation he first attained to widespread popularity. He became recognised as the poetical exponent of the newer ideals; and although in many things he was absolutely divorced from and completely out of sympathy with the opinions of their adherents, yet the other elements in his work were largely subordinated or neglected. At about this time he seemed to be

perfectly accepting their ideas and reflecting their enthusiasms. In 'Locksley Hall,' for long the most popular of his poems, all the characteristics of this movement were admirably and sympathetically depicted. The hero had nourished his youth with 'the fairy tales of science and the long result of Time'; he also

> Dipt into the future far as human eye could see;
> Saw the vision of the world and all the wonder that would be.[1]

And he found a somewhat speedy consolation for his rejected love in the contemplation of all the marvellous results which were being attained by this great age, through the work of the human intellect. And this was not only the dream of the owner of 'Locksley Hall'; it was the vision spreading itself before the eyes of the sanguine thinkers of the age — a vision which they anticipated time would speedily convert into reality. They also

> Saw the heavens filled with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
> Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales;
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Till the war drum throbbed no longer, and the battle flags were furl'd
> In the Parliament of man, the federation of the world.
>
> There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe,
> And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law.[2]
>
> . . . . . .

They also rejoiced in the coming period of progress;—

> Not in vain the distance beacons. Forward, forward let us range,
> Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change.[3]

The universal acclamation with which this was received exhibited Tennyson as the accredited exponent of the

[1] "Locksley Hall." [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*

newer ideal. "'Locksley Hall,'" said Kingsley, "has deservedly had so great an influence over the minds of the young. It is a man . . . conquering his selfish sorrow, and the moral and intellectual paralysis which it produces, by faith and hope—faith in the progress of science and civilisation, hope in the final triumph of good." "I was but a boy," says another writer, "just beginning to feel the stirring of hope and prompting of ambition, when a volume of Tennyson's poems was first put into my hand. By a happy chance I turned to 'Locksley Hall,' and never shall I forget the thrill of ecstasy with which I read and re-read the passionate lines until they seemed to burn themselves into my memory. New feelings of ardour were aroused in me, my mind seemed to open to splendid revelations."[1] It is "the passionate chant," said Professor Ingram, "in which are so vividly uttered all the undisciplined thoughts, the wayward fancies, the lofty but vague aspirations that effervesce in the spirit of the cultivated youth of the nineteenth century."

This cheerfully optimistic stage could not long endure. It was soon succeeded by a period of disenchantment. The newly accepted Trinity of Reason was found powerless to control 'those two giants the passion and the pride of man.' The car of progress travelled heavily along the road towards the land of universal plenty and peace. Natural Science, although continuing on its inventive career, was found to bring but little immediate amelioration of the condition of the great mass of mankind. 'What profits it,' men asked, 'to the human Prometheus, that he had stolen the fire of heaven to be his servant, and that the spirits of the earth and of the air obey him, if the vulture of pauperism is eternally to tear his

[1] Walters: "Tennyson," p. 49.

vitals and keep him on the brink of destruction.'[1] Freedom, exalted for worship above all things, often appeared a somewhat unstable Deity, at times becoming 'Freedom free to slay herself, and dying while they shout her name.'[2] Despite the progress of sweet reasonableness, the whole of Europe plunged fiercely into continual warfare. Even trade and commerce failed to provide objects permanently satisfying to the soul of man. The problems of poverty, of innocent suffering, seemed little nearer settlement. The golden age receded into an ever remoter future. In the realm of pure thought, reason unaccountably declined to prove the willing servant of a watery and sentimental enthusiasm of humanity. Man merely found more firmly emphasised by it the conviction of his own infinite littleness, and the certainty of his own inevitable end. Natural religion encountered pain, suffering, and death, and was unable to present any satisfactory answer to the questions they present with agonising insistence. Human selfishness, the beast in man uncontrollably rising up at intervals, the hunger after material pleasures, were found rebellious against its mild morality, and, discovering in it but faint power of resistance, seemed likely but to increase with its advancing influence.

The second period of the movement, roughly represented by the third quarter of the century, exhibits the attempts of its followers to reconstruct their creed in the light of this new experience. The whole truth was not yet recognised; and desperate attempts were essayed to bolster up some form of natural ethical creed, even on a pessimistic instead of an optimistic basis. 'In proportion as they thought it hopeless to formulate what was divine, they sought to deify what was human.'[3]

[1] Huxley: "Coll. Essays," vol. i. p. 423. [2] "Sixty Years After."
[3] Mallock: "Atheism," p. 131.

By cheerful illusions speciously woven, by refusal to recognise the logical consequences of their principles, by the adaptation of the phraseology of the older faiths, the hollow dummy was made to assume some indistinct semblance of life. The worship of Humanity was to replace the worship of God. The 'holy spirit of man' was to arouse that awe and adoration formerly associated with devotion to an All-righteous Deity. Natural laws were to guarantee the sanctions of ethical principles. 'Immortality in the race' was to satisfy the passionate hunger of man for some personal survival after death. The morality preached was to be as strenuous, as imperative, as absolute as in the older system; a law of man's being which he must not violate, ardently and earnestly maintained by the disciples of progress. But it was a morality whose end was hard to discover, whose binding force could be freely repudiated, and whose conclusions could with impunity be rejected by those who declined to accept its principles.

The true representative in English literature of this latter period, with its strong insistence on an ethical creed after all its strong sanctions had departed, was George Eliot. She realised, with terrible clearness, the future prophesied by Science when

> Human Time
> Shall fold its eyelids, and the human sky
> Be gathered like a scroll within the tomb,
> Unread for ever.

But she clung as desperately to a strong and stern morality, repudiating the suggestion that belief in God or in immortality was necessary for an imperative and unbending law of duty. "Vain as life may be," she says, "let us not lose heart utterly, for it is not wholly vain.

That things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number of those who have lived faithfully a hidden life and rest in unvisited tombs." [1]

Seek only Truth, even if the future be darkness. "The highest calling and election is *to do without opium* and live through all our pain with conscious, clear-eyed endurance." Maintain virtue, although virtue itself, with all human things, is vanity. Life is vain; but kindness is possible, and mutual toleration and helpfulness, and unselfish sacrifice for the happiness of others around us, and for the generations of the future. And the necessity for work while it is called day becomes all the more imperative with the full appreciation of the awful meaning of the words, 'because the night cometh'; the night when no work shall be done.

Tennyson's attitude towards this development of the party of Reason and Progress is one of rejection of their principles, and refusal to acknowledge their conclusions. He had represented the aspirations of his own time; but even in doing so he had gone beyond them. He had seen clearly that progress, reason, commerce, invention, all the idols of the newer age, could not permanently satisfy mankind. From the strenuous emotion produced by his own loss he had become convinced that faith in God and faith in immortality were necessities for the existence of the human race. And even in the triumph of the progressive party, when all the world seemed stretching fair before them and their principles acquiring universal acceptance, he had stood aside and shown his divergence from them on fundamental questions. A religion excluding these essential truths cannot be his religion. A knowledge which can find no place for them must be a

[1] "Middlemarch," Conclusion.

knowledge omitting the most important questions which have influenced the life of man. Before the open grave all the vague platitudes concerning the choir invisible, and the future of the race prove but 'vacant chaff well meant for grain.' And knowledge which would insist on this as being the last word on the matter is empty and worthless.

> Half grown as yet, a child, and vain—
> She cannot fight the fear of death,
> What is she, cut from love and faith,
> But some wild Pallas from the brain
> Of Demons?[1]

Not without result, indeed, like 'Paul with beasts,' had he fought with Death; and in this conflict he had finally apprehended that a purely natural view of life cannot satisfy. With the whole force of his spirit he stands up in protest, to assert that we are;—

> Not only cunning casts in clay:
> Let Science prove we are, and then
> What matters science unto men,
> At least to me? I would not stay.[2]

When, therefore, the time of dissolution arrived, Tennyson could stand aside. He saw farther into the future than his contemporaries. He could clearly discern whither their conclusions were carrying them; he possessed in no small degree that prophetic insight, which appeared to those around him to yield him the power of forecasting the future. He knew that these laborious attempts to construct religion without God and Immortality were destined to failure; and he was never backward in exhibiting the hollowness of their pretensions and the baselessness of their morality. It was a painful experience; it threw him into direct opposition

[1] "In Memoriam," cxiv. [2] *Ibid.* cxx.

to many of those who had formerly acclaimed him as their leader; much of the time he was a voice crying in the wilderness, foretelling disaster to a heedless generation. The age had gone past him, and left him as stranded high and dry, and deemed him a reactionary accepting dogmas which were needless and foolish and for ever done with; and they bitterly resented all his exposure of their carefully constructed systems, and his continual scorn of their 'know nothing creeds.'

> Truth for truth and good for good: the Good, the True, the Pure, the Just
> Take the charm 'for ever' from them and they crumble into dust.[1]

No argument nor invective could shake him from this position. He found himself opposed to a fervent and stern morality and an inherited love of right. This is the only morality possible, said his contemporaries; why set yourself so eagerly to destroy it? But Tennyson saw the inevitable consequences of their creed. If this is the only morality possible, he would tell them, then no morality is possible; for this is no morality at all. And, however much in the atmosphere of the older ideals you may manage to retain an irrational prejudice in favour of righteousness, your successors only too clearly will see the real consequences of your conclusions, and throw off a yoke which will have become to them simply burdensome.

And here, also, the prophetic insight was justified by results. In the third period of the movement—roughly, the last quarter of the nineteenth century—the naturalistic system of ethics has broken down. Other ideals have taken the place of the older principles so strenuously asserted. Morality, always arduous and difficult, as

[1] "Sixty Years After."

implying restraint upon 'natural' instincts, becomes, when supported only by dogmatic assertion of its necessity, merely tedious and irksome. Men, compelled to relinquish the satisfaction of a supernatural religion and a God of Love, decline to be longer cramped by its discomforts. The field is clear and the choice manifest to all. While laborious attempts at ethical reconstruction were being essayed, and Tennyson almost alone was prophesying their futility, a translation appeared, by one of Tennyson's greatest friends, of an old Persian poet, expressing in perfect language the ideal of life alone logically consistent with the postulates of Naturalism. This 'Rubaiyat, of Omar Khayyam,' at first almost unnoticed, attained an ever-growing influence, as a kind of rallying creed of the latest developments of the great movement of Progress and Reason. The logical result of denial of knowledge of God and Immortality is here clearly accepted; the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake, the taking of 'the cash,' and the letting of 'the credit go.'

> With them the seed of wisdom did I sow,
> And with mine own hand wrought to make it grow;
> And this was all the harvest that I reaped—
> 'I came like water and like wind I go.
>
> Into this Universe, and *Why* not knowing
> Nor *Whence*, like water willy-nilly flowing;
> And out of it, as Wind along the Waste
> I know not *Whither*, willy-nilly blowing.'[1]

And the conclusion is that of the hedonist philosophy of old—'Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die.'

> Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,
> Before we too into the dust descend;
> Dust unto Dust, and under Dust to lie
> Sans wine, sans song, sans singer, and—sans end.

[1] "Omar Kháyyam": Fitzgerald.

Outside is emptiness and chaos; soon the 'phantom caravan' will return to the 'nothing it set out from.' Knowledge is but 'lifting a corner of the delusion to get a glimpse of the everlasting night beyond.'[1] But one thing at least is certain; the reality of pleasure while it lasts, and the rapid passing of the pleasure-time of life.

> O Threats of Hell and hopes of Paradise!
> One thing at least is certain—*this* life flies;
> One thing is certain, and the rest is lies;
> The flower that once has blown for ever dies.

Pleasure is the only thing worth striving for, and this pleasure must be present delight; for any foresight of the future may be rendered vain by the increasing chances of death. When this satisfaction of personal desire conflicts with the pleasure of others, as in all the greater crises of life it must necessarily conflict in a world in which human goods are limited, it would be absurd and irrational to subordinate this real pleasure to the doubtful pleasure of those around us. For the present pleasure is real and all else is but uncertain shadow. 'In the sun among the leaves, upon the flowers,' death waits for us all; behind the gorgeous beauty, as in the vision of the old Roman poet, is the sadness of the knowledge that soon we must leave these pleasant places, and pass out alone into the darkness. By feasting and merriment this thought for a time may be forgotten; the successful man is the man who, in his short transitory tenure of existence, has crammed into his life as many distinct emotions of pleasure as possible; who has snatched at the gliding irrecoverable hours and drunk to the full their sad sweetness. "Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face, some tone on the hills or the sea is

[1] Dillon: "Sceptics of the Old Testament," p. 5.

choicer than the rest, some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us. . . . A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a varied dramatic life. . . . Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the very brilliancy of their gifts, some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening. . . . We are all under sentence of death, but with a sort of indefinite reprieve; we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more. . . . Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among the children of this world, in art and song. For our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time."[1]

And so has arisen a new Epicureanism, destined to grow with the wider acceptance of the naturalistic beliefs upon which it is founded. Death waits for all, for all life is uncertain; but for all at least youth is slipping by, and pleasure time will soon be over. Satisfy your desires while you may; snatch at the pleasure before it has gone for ever beyond your grasp; cram as many pulsations as possible into your transitory life; all too soon are the days drawing nigh "when thou shalt say, 'I have no pleasure in them.'"

We have said to the dream that caressed, to the terror that smote us,
Good-night and good-bye.[2]

Put away care from the heart; cease to be tormented with the spectre of an unknown future; live freely and well all the days of thy vanity; 'because there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest.'

[1] W. Pater: "The Renaissance," Conclusion.
[2] Swinburne: "A Century of Rondels."

And as an alternative to these ideals, founded on the same principle, there has also grown up a new Stoicism. The days of life are few and evil; nothing is sure, nothing is certain. Pleasure cannot satisfy. Man is greater than his desires, and can stand aside and apprehend his own pitiable condition, can grow 'tired of so little in this little life.' He

> Cannot ease the labour of past years
> Nor make quick coming death a little thing;

but he can at least endure in silence without useless murmuring. Bitter contempt of his condition, the incompatibility of the immensity of his aspirations with their inadequate power of realisation, will cause him to wrap himself up in his own stern endurance, and meet the end in silence. The worst that life can bring he can regard with serenity, knowing that some things, at least, it can never take from him—

> Two gifts perforce he has given us yet,
> Though sad things stay and glad things fly:
> Two gifts he has given us,—to forget
> All glad and sad things that go by
> And then—to die.[1]

'Life is but a continually-checked process of dying, says the great pessimistic philosopher, 'an ever postponed death. At last death must conquer; for by the very fact of birth we are made over to him, and he is only playing with his prey before he swallows it.'[2] And the only moral course open to the individual is the refusal to acquiesce in this system of trickery and vain deceit, to war with the craving for life, finally to overpower it, not by self-inflicted death but by the principle of renunciation,

[1] Swinburne: "Felése."

[2] Schopenhauer: "The World as Will and Idea," vol. i. p. 401.

of refusal to yield to its impulses, of a definite extirpation of Desire.

Tennyson's attitude to these latest developments of Naturalism is one of acceptance and protest. He had long foreseen this development of natural religion, and consequently was not unprepared for its manifestations. As his intellectual convictions protested against the principles of the second period, so his moral and spiritual instincts rise up against the principles of the third. His attitude towards them is 'solemn in its steadfastness rather than triumphant.' He knew that these beliefs formulate no new gospel; that they have previously appeared in the world's history, and have previously failed as a working creed of life. The fact that they invariably lead to silence and despair seems to him to justify the clinging to others until these are finally disproved. But he welcomes the new development as clearing the arena of combat, as exhibiting beyond doubt the ultimate battle-ground. Belief in God and belief in Immortality is thus recognised as indissolubly bound up with the future advance and continuance of the human race. Goodness, purity, moral effort are at length definitely assigned to the believer in the unseen. Natural religion, natural morality never again will be advocated as the religion of any large numbers of mankind. The movement which started with its unlimited optimism and sincere faith in human understanding has worked itself out; some of its followers sinking into pessimism, some advocating the hasty pursuit of pleasure, some turning back to the older ideals they had once despised, as the only means of satisfying the needs of humanity. 'The wheel has come full circle.' And as these results became more and more appreciated, so more and more did the people turn for guidance towards the poet who had foreseen the result, who had

maintained steadfast faith through the darkest days of the struggle. He had weighed up all the factors. He had refused to shut his eyes to the darkest alternatives; even at the end he can interpret to themselves the results of their own conclusions.

> He is only a cloud and a smoke who was once a pillar of fire,
> The guess of a worm in the dust and the shadow of its desire.[1]

And, in the 'Ancient Sage,' are expressed the full deductions from this fact; since

> The nameless Power or Powers, that rule
> Were never heard or seen,

therefore,

> Vain the tears for darkened years
> As laughter over wine;
> And vain the laughter as the tears
> O brother, mine or thine,
> For all that laugh, and all that weep,
> And all that breathe are one
> Slight ripple on the boundless deep
> That moves, and all is gone.[2]

And he could see and feel the sadness accompanying the downfall of the older faith. The world to him also was 'dark with griefs and graves so dark that men cry out against the Heavens.' 'Forward far and far from here is all the hope of eighty years.' In his old age the movement, the joyous birth of which he had sung at its first origin, seemed sinking into hopeless apathy and despair. But his faith is only growing brighter; and from 'this world so gloomed with woe you all but sicken at the shifting scenes,' he can turn at the portal of the grave and speak to the coming generations waiting for

[1] "Despair." [2] "The Ancient Sage."

his words of his confident, triumphant faith that 'all is well.'

'Spirit, nearing yon dark portal at the limit of thy human state
Fear not thou the hidden purpose of that Power which alone is great,
Nor the myriad world His Shadow, nor the silent Opener of the Gate.'[1]

I have climb'd to the snows of Age, and I gaze at a field in the Past,
Where I sank with the body at times in the sloughs of a low desire,
But I hear no yelp of the beast, and the Man is quiet at last,
As he stands on the heights of his life with a glimpse of a height that is higher.[2]

[1] "God and the Universe." [2] "By an Evolutionist."

XV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

IN attempting a summary and final estimate of any poet as a religious teacher, it is necessary to explain a certain ambiguity in the expression. From no poet can there rightly be demanded an orderly system of philosophy or theology; no teaching satisfying doubt by the presentation of an organised and systematic construction of answers to the problem which religion attempts to solve. The work of the poet must always be intuitive rather than ratiocinative; his primary function is the presentation of beauty as an artist, not the elaboration of an ethical creed or philosophic system. Only, as all art must work in a medium, and through this medium express certain principles having relation to the world and to the ideals of men—as, more especially, the material provided for the poet must primarily consist of the aspirations and thoughts of his contemporaries—the artist is perforce compelled to assert some form of belief; compelled, whether he would or no, to become a teacher. We have seen, in our study of Tennyson, how far this teaching may extend. In his case it consisted mainly in the adoption of a certain attitude towards life, and in the possession of a power of insight into men and movements, the seeing beyond the temporal and the transitory, the apprehension of the essential nature of the life of the world around him. The poet is not cramped, as the philosopher is cramped, by being confined to the steps of advance justified by reason; he can assert truths without being compelled to exhibit the logical consistency of each link in the process whereby he attained to knowledge of them. For this cause his

conclusions have been often the subject of contempt to the thinker, bound down into the narrow groove of the understanding, and regarding the poet's wide generalisations as unjustified, hazy, and obscure. But such methods possess some compensating advantages. The poet can allow free play to all the elements of his personality, while the philosopher is confined to one element in it illegitimately isolated. The understanding can be supplemented by Feeling, and justified by the demands of the practical Reason.

The answer of the poet to the problems of existence must not only satisfy the craving of the speculative intellect for logical consistency; it must also realise the desire of the aesthetic judgment, and provide a motive for action. It is the answer of the whole personality acting as an undivided unity; the philosopher's reply is often the mere ingenious manipulation of the concepts of the understanding. And consequently, though the poet's results appear often less grounded upon fact than those of organised thinkers, he usually in the end attains a clearer insight into the truth. The conclusions of the philosophy of any age are rapidly outgrown and forgotten; the intuitions of the poet become incorporated in the philosophy of the future.

This is true more especially in that sphere of speculation which we term religion. And here we must carefully distinguish what we mean when we estimate the work of any poet as a religious teacher. There have been poets of all ages who can be definitely classed together as religious poets. They are poets who express in verse certain definite emotions, peculiarly associated with the religious elements of consciousness. Their range of thought is generally limited; within that range they sink deep. Adoration and worship, spiritual uplifting, the awe, wonder, and reverence of the soul before its

Maker, provide the subject-matter of their poems. In Christian times God, Christ, the soul's probation and trial, the soul's salvation, are the themes to which they mainly confine themselves. The Latin poets of the Mediæval Church, Crawshaw and George Herbert in the seventeenth century, Christina Rossetti and Francis Thompson in our own time, are examples of poets who have thus attempted to represent in verse these great emotions of the human spirit.

Amongst those who are wanting in this definite religious consciousness, or who have ceased to cultivate it to any appreciable extent, this poetry is not received with sympathy. To those, again, who regard it as dealing with abstractions and relics of a past age of superstition, and figments of an unhealthy mind, this poetry will fail to appeal. Its scope is limited in range; it can only set vibrating chords already present; it expresses religious emotion, it does not assist or strengthen religious faith. Such poets are religious poets; they are not teachers of religion.

There are other poets who more widely exemplify the definition of poetry as a criticism of life. They possess, in addition to the essential faculty of style, the large sympathies and speculative insight necessary to teachers of humanity. They penetrate below the surface; they make plain elements of existence hitherto concealed; they realise in their own mind as living difficulties some of the fundamental problems that have troubled mankind since the dawn of history. They 'justify the ways of God to man,' or they exhibit motives, which make life worth living; they reveal the good behind the evil or the firm ground beyond the change. They are often startling in their sudden flashes of insight; they raise the cry of hope above despair; they show the thread running through the tangled maze of life; to

those perplexed and troubled around them, they bring a new gospel. They may not seem to be, in the narrower sense, definitely religious; they may not adhere to any recognised Church or creed; they do not emphasise the unique religious emotions. But they contribute new reason for action, new hopes for the future; they enable men to take up the burden of living with a fresh energy and a more intense purpose. And these are, in the widest sense of the word, great religious teachers. Such have been, in our own day, Walt Whitman and Robert Browning. Browning has 'gone the whole round of creation,' penetrated into the inmost depths, the darkest crevasses of the human soul; he can return protesting his message — 'All 's love, yet all 's law.' He can assert himself as 'one who never turned his back, but marched breast forward'; he can maintain that we 'fall to rise, are baffled to fight better, sleep to wake.' Whitman, on the other hand, can contribute a calm serenity, a grateful acceptance of life as it is, a recognition of the beauty of common things, a steadfast unassailable conviction that the Universe is good. And both have been great teachers. Men have derived from them new ideas of the worth of effort, and new conviction of the goodness of the world, and new motives for the struggle of existence.

Now, Tennyson does not directly fall into either of these classes. In the narrower sense he was not a religious poet; in the wider sense he was not a teacher of religion.

The definite religious emotions, the spiritual side of religion, he rarely if ever depicted. In poems like 'St Agnes' Eve' and 'Sir Galahad,' experiments in throwing himself into the position of others, he is only viewing, as an outsider, feelings never actually experienced. Personal devotion to Christ, personal experience

of sin, direct consciousness of the presence of God, these do not in any way furnish the *motifs* of his poems. On the other hand, he did not maintain any unwavering attitude of triumph and optimistic conviction, which would have enabled him to teach a new creed, or proclaim a new religion. He was too uncertain himself; his faith often grew dim; he was striving, for the most part, in the dark, with only at intervals uncertain gleams of light. He strenuously proclaimed, indeed, one principle, and never forsook it all through his long life; but often the horizon appeared to him to be darkening, and his religion rather the last refuge of despair, than the joyful assertion of firm belief. Right on until the end, sadness and hope, doubt and faith alternately reveal themselves in his writings.

For although he accepted all fresh evidence before him, he had ever clung tenaciously to certain sets of opinions, and had never launched out boldly into the unknown. Browning shrunk at no enterprise, stopped short nowhere; no fresh facts could weaken his triumphant optimism. So, also, no fresh facts could shake Whitman's imperturbable certainty of the goodness of things.

I sit and look out upon all the sorrows of the world, and upon all oppression and shame;

. . . . . .

All these—all the meanness and agony without end I sit looking out upon,
See, hear, and am silent.[1]

The one saw the good in the evil; the other saw the good despite the evil. With Tennyson the reader is never on perfectly sure ground. Just as he seems confident and clear, some fresh outbreak of brutality or wickedness

[1] Whitman: "Leaves of Grass."

comes before his gaze, or some new discovery seems to render invalid older arguments for the beneficence of God; or simply through the changes of life a time arises when faith falls asleep. And the result is that his voice becomes tremulous and uncertain, and difficulties loom larger, and he is thrown back once again to that almost blind faith in the ultimate reality and triumph of goodness which formed the one belief to which he ever desperately clung.

And so, perhaps, more than either of his two great contemporaries, he reflects the mind of his age; an age, in its later developments, doubting, yet struggling with doubt, chaotic, discouraged, uncertain of the present, distrustful of the future. He can see the futility of premature synthesis; he can lament the destruction which has overtaken beliefs once held indubitably valid; he can look forward with hopefulness to the 'deeper voice across the storm.' But to his troubled and tumultuous generation he can provide little positive teaching for those who would come to him for guidance, beyond a passionate assertion of certain verities which seemed to him necessary to human life, and a firm faith that out of the complex currents and conflicts of thought all around him, some satisfactory guiding belief would be ultimately evolved.

Yet although, when we attempt to sum up his positive contributions to religious speculation, we find them meagre and uncertain, it cannot be doubted that he possesses a real, and even an increasing, importance as a religious teacher; and this through his assertion of old truths, with all the effect of his wonderful poetical faculty. Perfection of style often passes for originality of thought; and the reflection, with all the charm of literary grace of the ill-expressed thoughts of others, may well bring them home to us with a force and a freshness which

formerly they failed to possess. The Omnipotence and Perfection of God, the continual Evolution of the human spirit, and the progress of the whole human race under the divine guidance towards that unity which is the goal of all things, are truths which have been advanced and maintained by previous thinkers; but, asserted by Tennyson with his marvellous command of language, they have been endowed with a reality which they never before possessed.

But Tennyson's influence in the world of thought was perhaps negative rather than positive. During most of his life he was in the attitude of protest, of refusal to recognise certain principles whose praises were loudest on every tongue. He did not, indeed, as so many have done, set himself directly against the popular movement in thought and philosophy; nor did he consistently ignore it. He accepted all facts as facts, acknowledging that it is impossible to fight against the convictions of the human reason. All the conclusions of modern science and modern criticism, however unpalatable their results, however desperate their apparent tendencies, he recognised and welcomed. So that, in a sense, men were compelled to acknowledge that Tennyson at least faced the problems of the age; that he did not refuse to acknowledge facts because they disagreed with his own theories; that he did not twist facts to suit his own prejudices; that in the region of thought he was emphatically '*no skulker.*'

And yet there were certain general principles which Tennyson asserted near the beginning of his career and never in his darkest moments disowned—principles which seemed to him absolutely necessary for human existence. Whatever the progress of knowledge may bring, he maintained, it cannot ultimately affect these. Despite much apparent contradiction, and much that seemed

misty, he clung to these verities with a faith that only grew firmer as the evidence for them appeared to be crumbling away. He acknowledged that consistent theories at the present stage of thought were perhaps impossible; that the older view of things had broken down; the older evidence, which had once seemed so satisfactory, had been swept away. Criticism, modern scientific theories, had shattered the forms in which past generations had represented the essential realities of life. He frankly acknowledged the impossibility in the present age of any completely satisfactory logical synthesis. Always would be left ragged edges; always at the last the final appeal must be to faith. The time for reconstruction was not yet. That such a reconstruction would take place after the din and cloud of battle had cleared away, he had no manner of doubt. Meanwhile, the important work of the religious teacher was to insist on the vitality of these principles of life, and to protest that, despite the necessity for restatement of the outward symbols, their ultimate truth remained firm and unshaken.

God, Self, Immortality: these must be real, not shadows; else effort is an aimless futility, and life a miserable lie. God, not an uncertain blind 'power that makes for righteousness,' or a convenient name for an unknowable something behind phenomena; but, however much transcending our finite ideals, at least a personality, apprehended most readily as personal, with a purpose guiding the world, and a plan directing the apparently blind sweeping forward of things in perpetual change. Self, not a bundle of sensations, nor a mere shadow reflection of immutable laws of matter, but a self unconditioned by material things, preserving its identity through change, helping to create the physical world around it, possessing the inexplicable power of freedom,

and of choice between good and evil. Immortality, not a hollow trickery as absorption in the life of the race and the memory of the future, nor a return of unconscious energy to the chaos from which it arose; but a survival of the personality beyond death, a continual upward progress towards perfection, carried forward from this world into the worlds beyond the grave.

These are necessary for a religion. Without them universal suicide or a hungry pursuit of pleasure become the only reasonable alternatives. For Tennyson, at least, this appears certain; however much one might deceive one's self by the adoption of the older terminology, sooner or later the ineffectual sanction of the other systems must be discovered. And it was because he so clearly realised this that he clung so firmly to these three essential truths. He could not prove them; in the turmoil and conflict of this strange and disordered century men had wandered away from them, and vehemently protested that they could do without them. Standing aloof, and often doubtful of the future, Tennyson continuously asserted that he would not worship shadows. 'The ineffable longing for the life of life baffled for ever' by earthly things, compelled him to cling to faith, in 'a clearer day than our poor twilight dawn on earth.'

> If night what barren toil to be!
> What life, so maim'd by night, were worth
> Our living out? Not mine to me
> Remembering all the golden hours
> Now silent, and so many dead.

How far was Tennyson justified in this position, in the assertion by faith of truths which never could be proved? Is it legitimate to read back results into primary conclusions? Can we assert or deny a belief on account of its consequences? It may be certain that life is empty and vain without belief in God and immortality; but

why, after all, should life not be empty and vain? It may be true that with this knowledge the world will grow greyer, and enthusiasm and heroic effort finally die away; but is the fact any justification for asserting lies? Is it not better to follow truth alone, be the results what they may; praying 'if our end be death, show light, and let us die.'

Such a position has been taken up by many in this century, who have even been able to derive a kind of grim consolation from the thought that truth persists, although all else perishes.

> It fortifies my soul to know
> That though I perish truth is so,

says a contemporary poet. And fierce prophets of the new reformation have lavished all their energies in denunciation of those who would assert lies in the so-called interests of morality.

It may perhaps be doubted if even in this extreme position the advocates of the 'New Reformation' are justified in the blind worship of their deity. If the pursuit of truth means the gradual acquisition of knowledge that will ultimately prove destructive to the higher energies of the human race, it is difficult to conceive why, except on some principle of faith, such enthusiasm should animate its advocates. The relative validity of sense-given knowledge is elevated into serious import only by the possibility of its utilisation, by some Power beyond, for the gradual revelation, in symbolic language, of Eternal Reality. If the only consciousness in the Universe is the accidental consciousness of the human race, and beyond this is but blind drift and chaotical matter and 'the flux of mortal things,' the distorted and doubtful information which alone man is able to obtain concerning the uncertainties of the external world seems scarcely worthy of enthusiasm or adoration.

What could he better wish than then to die.

. . . . . .

Why should he pray to range
Down the long age of truth that ripens slow;
And break his heart with all the baffling change
And all the tedious tossing to and fro?

Tennyson, however, did not accept this extreme position. He also maintains Truth as ultimate; and in any conclusion indubitably proven, however deplorable, he would acknowledge that the human spirit must acquiesce. If 'some voice that men could trust' should finally announce that 'death was the end of life,' that 'man goeth down to the pit and all his thoughts perish,' he would agree that, however hopeless, this position must be frankly accepted and proclaimed. Only he says such a voice has not yet spoken. The issue is still uncertain; reason cannot speak on the question with undisputable authority. And, while thus in half shadow and dim light, he protests energetically not only against the assumption of the negative conclusion but also against the suspension of judgment accompanied by the statement that data insufficient for certainty is provided.

Because we cannot conclusively *prove* a beneficent Deity or a future continuance, therefore it is immoral to assert them; because the spiritual world is possibly non-existent, therefore we must banish from us all interest in it, fixing our attention on the things of earth and on those alone;—this is the position Tennyson condemns as impossible. Humanity cannot thus put aside as of no account divergences which must modify every act of daily existence and produce change in its whole system of living. Life shut up to its few and uncertain years, never contented, never resting, always yearning for something beyond, with possibilities of unfulfilled realisation, and infinite capacity of Love, must be based upon one

or other of the alternatives. Suspense of judgment is impossible when interpreted as suspense of action; the conclusions of the theoretical reason must hourly be converted into practical choice.

To refuse to assert God's existence is effectually the same as dogmatically to deny it. And once this is realised, and the necessity for the choice between the assumption of two alternatives neither of which is conclusively proved, is clearly recognised, the venture of faith dependent on the assertion of the highest morality and adherence to the difficult path of duty becomes 'not the pitiful refuge of a credulous superstition, but the heroic assertion of the forlorn hope of the human spirit.'

In the balancing of probabilities which decide individual action, the practical results of the differing theories must decide. In this, *the* question for each, compared with which all other decisions sink into insignificance, is it not the right course to stake all upon the high supra-mundane belief, even if for the present the evidence is doubtful, and the possibility always before us that the other alternative may after all be true and our whole life and action a living lie. 'That man is morally unbelieving,' says Kant, 'who does not accept that which, though impossible to know, is morally necessary to suppose,' — morally necessary, when the alternative is 'dust and ashes.' 'Faith is the moral attitude of Reason as to belief in that which is unattainable by theoretical cognition. It is therefore the permanent principle of the mind to assume as true that which it is necessary to pre-suppose as the condition of the possibility of the highest moral final purpose.'

And Tennyson's position is strengthened by consideration of the history of philosophic thought. All through the past centuries the assertion of the ultimate spirituality of the world has been at intervals overthrown by its sceptics,

and each time the defeat has appeared final. Pure empiricism has been elevated as truth, and all men have been commanded to worship. Yet each time the spiritual principle, held to be destroyed, has been re-asserted, and once more attained victory. It would be madness to assume that finality in this periodic progress had been attained in the middle of the nineteenth century. The method by which light will again arise is never visible at any particular period of darkness and disquietude; and in all these periods there have been those who have yielded to despair and deemed that belief in God and a future life must be finally abandoned. But in every age, also, there have been a few 'Witnesses of the Unseen,' isolated and rejected, who have by faith asserted the truths beyond the storm, in confidence that the darkness would once again vanish before the day. Out of sympathy with the prevailing spirit, their conclusions have been often regarded by their contemporaries with dislike or contempt; but when the reaction arrives and the 'red of the dawn' breaks upon the horizon, it is to those who have kept faithful through the long night to whom the people turn for guidance with gratitude and love.

It is as one of these 'Witnesses of the Unseen' that Tennyson will be finally regarded; and it is his constant adherence to these principles, more than any direct constructive philosophy, which has given him his wide-spread and increasing influence as a religious teacher. All through the century he had protested his faith; and when, towards the close, men turned from their dying systems and a world which refused to respond to their efforts, it was from those who had remained steadfast, that they sought help and teaching. Never was Tennyson's influence greater than at the close of his long career. With the alternatives clearly laid before them, men cried once again for the older faiths; a life

'without hope and without God in the world' was a life which the human reason itself refused to accept. And the fact that Tennyson had remained faithful to his ideal, and refused to relinquish it or be hurried away by those who clamoured around him, more perhaps than anything in his actual teaching, gave him an almost unique influence in his old age. 'As seeing Him who is invisible' he had endured until the end. For his early poetry he had been hailed as the prophet of the new movements of the century. Then their followers had broken away from him, refusing to hear his voice, going out into the wilderness to serve strange gods. He could not be indifferent to the change. His music sank into a minor key; the tone of sadness in it deepened and became predominant. For years he seemed like his own blind prophet, compelled to prophesy disaster to a generation heedless of his presages and neglectful of his teaching; often the thought must have come home to him:—

> This power hath work'd no good to aught that lives,
> And these blind hands are useless in their wars.[1]

And the final prayer of 'Tiresias' has a nearer application than to the old Greek legend, and must have been the reflection of a mood increasingly present as the years went by.

> But for me
> I would that I were gather'd to my rest
> And mingled with the famous kings of old
> On whom about their ocean islets flash
> The faces of the gods—the wise man's word
> Here trampled by the populace underfoot
> There crown'd with worship.[2]

[1] "Tiresias." [2] *Ibid.*

For many years he deliberately turned from contemporary life, from singing to a generation that refused to listen to his message, confining himself to studies of a former time, when faith was real and life more simple.

Then, at the end, he returns to the world around him; a world how changed from that new age of sanguine hopefulness, in which he had commenced his career. Already his predictions are being fulfilled. The wrecks of the systems whose downfall he had prophesied lie strewn on every shore. Tired of vain wandering, like children gone astray, his people are seeking guidance. Now, at length, when his life is drawing to its close, they will again listen to his voice. And to this newer generation, regarding with strange awe and reverence one who had survived the storm and emerged unbeaten from the conflict, he asserts his steadfast adherence to the beliefs that alone had rendered endurable the arduous struggle. Doubt no longer that the Highest is the Wisest and the Best; Trust the God of light to guide His people; Love will conquer at the last. The faith which had sustained him through the long day's toil, burns brighter as the shadows fall. The young mariners with all the hope of the future, from the 'haven under the sea-cliff,' are watching with eyes of wonder, 'the gray Magician'; 'I am Merlin,' he says, 'And I am dying; I am dying, who follow the Gleam.' And, 'on the borders of boundless ocean,' he can but urge them to be faithful to the Quest, to take up the journey, to follow the Gleam 'over the margin,' beyond the confines of the world. The 'calling from the sea' had come at sunset; 'that which drew from out the boundless Deep,' was turning again Homeward. Only to those gathered by the shore, gazing with troubled faces into the darkness, he will leave for his latest message the assurance of the future and the promise of the end.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.

'He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; So He bringeth them into the haven where they would be.'

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